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CHURCH HISTORY  
IN THE LIGHT  
OF THE SAINTS



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# CHURCH HISTORY IN THE LIGHT OF THE SAINTS

By Rev. Joseph A. Dunney

"The energy of the Saints has left everywhere its dents upon the world. When these, reviled for impotence, have turned their half-disdainful hand to tasks approved by the multitudes, they have borne away the palm from the world in its own prized exercises."

—FRANCIS THOMPSON

New York  
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
1944

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• • • • • FRANCIS J. SPELLMAN, D. D.  
Archbishop, New York

New York, August 2, 1944

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*First Printing.*

# CONTENTS

## SAINT OF THE CENTURY

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. SAINT PETER . . . . .	3
First Vicar of Christ	
II. SAINT JUSTIN MARTYR . . . . .	25
Preeminent Apologist	
III. SAINT ANTHONY . . . . .	45
Founder of Monasticism	
IV. SAINT JEROME . . . . .	59
God's Battler	
V. SAINT PATRICK . . . . .	81
Light of the North	
VI. SAINT BENEDICT . . . . .	105
The Ideal Monk	
VII. SAINT COLUMBAN . . . . .	125
Vagrant of Heaven	
VIII. SAINT BONIFACE . . . . .	147
Tamer of Tribes	
IX. SAINT ANSGAR . . . . .	169
Apostle of the Vikings	
X. SAINT BERNARD OF MENTHON . . . . .	191
Apostle of the Alps	
XI. SAINT EDWARD THE CONFESSOR . . . . .	211
Sans Peur et Sans Reproche	

CHAPTER	PAGE
XII. SAINT BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX . . . . .	235
Father of Western Mysticism	
XIII. SAINT THOMAS OF AQUINO . . . . .	257
Europe's Greatest Thinker	
XIV. SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA . . . . .	281
The Seraph-Hearted	
XV. SAINT JOAN OF ARC . . . . .	301
Savior of France	
XVI. SAINT IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA . . . . .	323
Champion of the Church	
XVII. SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE . . . . .	345
Father of Modern Pedagogy	
XVIII. SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DI ROSSI . . . . .	367
Paragon of Priestliness	
XIX. SAINT JOHN BAPTIST VIANNEY . . . . .	387
Marvel of the World	
SAINTS AND MARTYRS IN THE AMERICAS	
XX. SAINT ROSE OF LIMA . . . . .	411
Flower of the New World	
XXI. SAINT ISAAC JOGUES . . . . .	433
Servant of Savages	
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	453
INDEX . . . . .	459

## MAPS

	PAGE
The Roman Empire at its Greatest Extent . . . . .	21
Europe in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries . . . . .	130
Arab Conquests, Seventh and Eighth Centuries . . . . .	157
Europe in the Middle of the Sixteenth Century . . . . .	333
The Western Hemisphere Showing First Explorations . . . . .	417



# Saint Peter

FIRST VICAR OF CHRIST

# SAINT PETER AND THE FIRST CENTURY

<i>Roman Emperors</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>A.D.</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
AUGUSTUS, -14	Holy Family in Nazareth	1	
	Jesus teaches in the Temple	8	
TIBERIUS, 14-37	Andrew and Simon, seamen of Galilee	25	
	Appearance of John the Baptist	26	
	Public ministry	c 27	
	Passion and death of Jesus	c 30	ST. PETER,
	Birthday of the Church	c 30	c 30-67
	St. Peter, Bishop of Antioch	33	
CALIGULA, 37-41	All Palestine under Herodian Prince	41	
CLAUDIUS, 41-54	St. Peter goes to Rome	c 42	
	The name "Christian" first used	44	
	St. Peter preaches in Palestine	44	
	St. Peter visits the Asiatic provinces	45	
	St. Peter's first epistle from Rome	c 48	
	Jewish worship forbidden in Rome	50	
	First Council of Jerusalem	50	
	St. Paul's third journey	52	
NERO, 54-68	St. Paul imprisoned at Rome	61	
	St. James, Bishop of Jerusalem, martyred	62	
	St. Peter's second Epistle from Rome	63	
	Nero's persecution of the Christians	64	
	Judeo-Roman War	66	
	Sts. Peter and Paul martyred in Rome	67	ST. LINUS,
	St. John goes to Asia Minor	67	67-79
GALBA, 68-69	Death of Nero by his own hand	68	
VESPASIAN, 69-78	Titus destroys Jerusalem	70	
TITUS, 79-81			ST. ANACLETUS, 79-89
DOMITIAN, 81-96	Persecution under Domitian	81	ST. CLEMENT, 88-97
	Christian communities flourish in Italy	95	
NERVA, 96-98			
TRAJAN, 98-117	Last days of St. John	100	ST. EVARISTUS, 97-105

## SAINT PETER AND THE FIRST CENTURY

### *The Land Jesus Loved*

The Sea of Galilee showed no larger than a speck on the imperial military map. Rome in her pride of possession regarded it as a mere drop in that hot oven, the Oriental province. Even so, its waters were alive with busy little craft, its shores lined with towns, wharves and factories. The well-built roads which girded the coasts were trodden by the Legion, relieving guard in the cities and enforcing the Roman peace by their fear-inspiring standard S.P.Q.R. All patriotic Jews deeply resented the presence of that engine of oppression; and though shackled by the stranger within their gates, they dreamed of a day when their crushed nation would regain life and liberty. Not the least of these freedom-loving folk were Andrew and Simon, brawny sons of Jona the Galilean. Born in Bethsaida, brought up by good parents in the spirit of the Law, they grew to love their native shore and chose the life of hard-working fishermen. Andrew the elder was strong and capable, Simon was daring itself, fiery and impetuous. The treacherous waters had no terrors for those hardy seafarers, whose fishing boat cut the restless blue of Geneserath and who themselves appear to have caught some of the character of its volcanic depths. Day after day they ventured far out into the deep, cast heavy nets, and brought home the catch. But their hearts only half engaged in the task, for they were waiting in the silent hope for the Messiah, Who, they were sure, would help them throw off the yoke of Rome.

One day in the year 26 startling news reached the ears of these Galilean loyalists. John the Baptist, a great prophet,

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

was preaching deliverance! Down by the desert edge, only sixty miles away, they might find him, "the voice crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord." All that the excited messengers could report was that this strange ascetic appeared out of nowhere and stood on the wayside rocks, proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom. No sooner had the caravans brought news of the Baptist's fiery attacks than crowds poured out from Jerusalem to hear his message of hope and repentance. Nay more, the rumor ran, many Scribes and Pharisees were questioning his bold words: "Now is the axe laid to the root of the tree. Every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire."<sup>1</sup> Andrew and Simon agreed it was not time to tarry any longer with their tangled nets; indeed for all they knew the Expected of the Nations might actually be among them. So, carrying their dream in their hearts, the brothers headed for the wilderness of the Jordan. At last they saw with their own eyes the great ascetic — the man of one work, one love, loyal to Christ even unto death. But the blessed moment came when Andrew heard the Baptist say: "Behold, the Lamb of God!" and caught a glimpse of Jesus of Nazareth. Up spoke the Galilean fisherman asking Jesus where He abode. "Come and see," was the gentle reply, and thus Andrew had the privilege of staying with the Master all that day. Anon accosting Simon with the glad word, "We have found the Messias!" he brought his brother to Jesus. And Jesus, looking upon the eager warmhearted young fisherman, said: "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona: Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is interpreted the Rock."<sup>2</sup> What a divine destiny awaited that Rock — Simon Peter!

Back at their trade again, the sons of Jona cast out into

<sup>1</sup> Luke III, 9

<sup>2</sup> John I, 41-42

## *Saint Peter and the First Century*

the deep and mended nets on the seashore. But they were strangely restless; with hearts full of hope they counted the days since their sojourn in the Jordan country. All this time, remember, their purpose was divinely fixed, themselves inwardly pledged to mighty loyalties. The hour came when Jesus appeared, beckoning them. "Come after Me," He cried. "Come after Me and I will make you fishers of men." They had been waiting, and jumped to the call; "leaving all things they followed Him."<sup>3</sup> Theirs was no volatile enthusiasm, but the action that springs from living faith and love. Out now for active service, they were by way of becoming intimates of the Master, their resolve was never to leave Him. And while they were travelling along the strand of Galilee others were called — James and John, Philip and Nathaniel. The little group became close-knit in the spirit of simple, forthright devotion. One morning they accompanied Jesus and Mary to a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Love deeper than any amaze grew in loyal hearts, when they saw the Master work His first public miracle by changing weak water into rich wine! "After this, Jesus went down to Capharnaum. He and His mother and His brethren, and His disciples; and they remained there not many days."<sup>4</sup>

### *The Public Ministry*

At last the Ministry of the Kingdom was well launched, and many people followed Jesus, believing Him to be the long-expected Messiah. Twelve men — all Galileans except Judas of Kerioth in Judea, were presently numbered in the highly favored company of disciples. Think of their privilege; daily they lived in fellowship with Our Lord; hourly they observed His acts, heard His words, drawing therefrom light

<sup>3</sup> Matt. IV, 19

<sup>4</sup> John II, 12

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

and power. But, will the multitude stay with Him or will they prove fair-weather disciples — “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who gathereth not with Me, scattereth!”<sup>5</sup> The test is not far off; it came the day Jesus multiplied loaves and fishes to feed the five thousand. A great discourse followed in which He declared Himself the Living Bread from Heaven: “Amen, amen I say to you, except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you shall not have life in you.”<sup>6</sup> At these words all appeared to be taken by surprise. Many indeed were shocked, many more murmured; some alas, turned away and walked no more with Jesus. Sad of heart, the Master addressed the Twelve: “Will you also go away?” Peter replied in an outburst of ecstatic loyalty, “Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have known that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God.”<sup>7</sup> Here was vital trust! deathless hope, loving enthusiasm! The chief disciple might, yes, would, falter under sudden onsets of trial, yet never was there question of his abiding allegiance.

The world's history was being divinely changed during those days when Jesus came in and went out among men. Mars and Eros still held sway, while on Caesar's throne Tiberius watched all roads for legates with reports of political and military successes. Wily agents arrived daily with news from Britain, Spain, Gaul, Egypt; there were messengers too from the Orient. In Palestine, one Pontius Pilate held forth as Roman governor of Judea; Herod, the tetrarch, exacted hated taxes in Galilee; Ituria and Abilina were ruled by Philip and Lysanius. Now and then the disciples heard their Master refer to the existent political situation: “Ye

<sup>5</sup> Luke XI, 23

<sup>6</sup> John VI, 54-59

<sup>7</sup> John VI, 68-69

## *Saint Peter and the First Century*

know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and the great impose their authority upon them.”<sup>8</sup> “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s but to God the things that are God’s.”<sup>9</sup> “The Son of Man came not to be ministered to but to minister, and to give His life a redemption for many.”<sup>10</sup> So spoke the Lord of the World but the rank and file of Jewry still had their doubts, being moral cowards in their hearts. And little did the Emperor dream that in this obscure corner of his eastern domain was the inception of a divine revolution, a reign destined to outlive the Empire itself, a Kingdom of God in the hearts of men.

Three God-spent years announcing that Kingdom! Along the roads of Judea and Samaria, in the towns and cities of Galilee, the disciples wended their blessed way. They saw the Master heal and bless and pray; they marvelled at the way He breathed over human lives and filled them with happiness.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet  
Of him that bringeth good tidings,  
Of him that sheweth forth good,  
That sayeth to Sion: Thy God shall reign.<sup>11</sup>

The little band, united in love and devotion, moved by the side of Jesus. But time and again it was Peter, above all the others, who proved the mettle of his deathless faith. On their last journey together to Jerusalem the Master will put two questions: “Whom do men say I am? Who do you say I am?” Peter answers: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Thereat Jesus rewards him with: “Blessed art thou, Simon son of Jona, for flesh and blood have not

<sup>8</sup> Matt. XX, 26

<sup>9</sup> Matt. XXII, 21

<sup>10</sup> Matt. XX, 28

<sup>11</sup> Is. LII, 7

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

revealed it to thee but My Father Who is in Heaven. And I say to thee: Thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, it shall be bound also in Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in Heaven."<sup>12</sup> Observe that with the sole exception of the Baptist, this is the only time Our Lord pronounced a beatitude on an individual. One can very plainly see that Peter was set apart from the others, divinely destined to become their leader.

### *The Rock — Cephas!*

What manner of man was this whom Christ chose to be the Rock — the foundation stone of His Church? A natural leader, Peter was affectionate but of quick temper: brave, yet not seldom wavering: rough and ready, none the less sincere, single of eye, clean of heart. Heir to a past with all its bluff and brawn, his defects of quality had to be corrected. Well for Peter that he has a Divine Master Who can teach him to obey, tame his impetuous spirit, demand that he humbly submit to the yoke. In fact, no disciple received rebukes so often as the Rock-man upon whom Jesus designed to build His Church. Important then to study the formation of this spokesman of the Twelve; instructive to observe how Christ proceeded to check the prominent faults of His Apostle in the making. It happened one day early in the public ministry that the disciples in Peter's boat found themselves in direst peril, adrift in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Lo! the Master appeared, walking on the waters, and Peter made a boastful challenge, nay more, boldly attempted to tread the waves. But see his sudden fear as he sinks, hear the piteous

<sup>12</sup> Matt. XVI, 13-19

## *Saint Peter and the First Century*

appeal for help, and note the Master's gentle rebuke: "O, thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?"<sup>13</sup> Again, when the Master speaks of His impending suffering and death, the outspoken disciple protests, "Lord, be it far from Thee, this shall not be unto Thee." And this time he draws a strong rebuke: "Get behind Me, satan, thou art a scandal unto Me: because thou savorest not the things that are of God, but the things that are of men."<sup>14</sup>

How often Peter lets his heart run away with his head. How frequently he wrestles with "self," suffers from an endless conflict going on in his breast. He appears utterly unable to grasp the greater things of the spirit and has to be led on firmly in the face of many relapses. Quick to make snap judgments, he jumps at conclusions, airs his mistaken notions. Not once, but many times he questions the Christ as to the practical bearing of His words; "Lord, dost Thou speak this parable to us, or likewise to all?"<sup>15</sup> "Lord, how often shall my brother offend against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?"<sup>16</sup> "Look, Lord, we have left all things and have followed Thee: what therefore shall we have?"<sup>17</sup> Quite brash, he pledged His Master to pay the Temple tax, and while Our Lord indeed accepted the obligation, at the same time He taught His rash disciple a timely lesson.<sup>18</sup> The raw vigor of the man, his yielding firmness, nay his questionable resourcefulness appear in cumulative force. One has only to read the refusal at the Last Supper to be washed: his pathetic inability to watch one hour in Gethsemane: his swift sword-play before the angry mob: and, saddest of all,

<sup>13</sup> Matt. XIV, 31

<sup>14</sup> Matt. XVI, 22-23

<sup>15</sup> Luke XII, 41

<sup>16</sup> Matt. XVIII, 21

<sup>17</sup> Matt. XIX, 27

<sup>18</sup> Matt. XVII, 24

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

his triple denial. No wonder Peter fled from the court of Caiaphas driven by a panic of shame, burning with the fever of a racked soul. Tears, bitter tears, attest the broken disciple brought face to face with the poor naked reality that is himself. But repentance wakes in his soul, repentance which is followed by divine forgiveness. The mercy that shone in the eyes of the captive Savior will win the day in His disciple's heart, stronger now, as he walks in grief, still living in His light by which he sees all other lights. . . .

Christ is risen! Signs of His tender love for the penitent disciple multiply. An angel at the sepulchre commands the holy women: "Go, tell His disciples and Peter."<sup>19</sup> The fact that the Head of the Twelve was the first of them to behold the Lord is attested beyond all doubt. There is no denying, either, that Peter's importance is increasingly recognized by his Master Who had long distinguished him beyond all his companions. On his side the disciple attempts to make a return for all that love and trust. The climax of his pent-up affection came the day Christ appeared on the shores of Lake Genesareth. "And when the morning was come, Jesus stood on the shore. . . . That disciple, therefore whom Jesus loved said to Peter: It is the Lord! Simon Peter when he heard that it was the Lord, girt his coat about him . . . and cast himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the ship. . . ." <sup>20</sup> On this occasion the devotion of the impetuous disciple is again rewarded: "Simon, son of Jona, lovest Thou Me more than these? He sayeth to Him: Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee. He sayeth to him: "Feed My lambs. . . . Feed My sheep."<sup>21</sup> Now that Cephas has been exhorted to tend and feed Christ's sheep, never shall

<sup>19</sup> John XX, 2

<sup>20</sup> John XXI, 7-8

<sup>21</sup> John XXI, 15-17

## *Saint Peter and the First Century*

that pastoral image be out of his mind, even unto the end will that great charge be treasured in his heart.<sup>22</sup>

### *The Early Church*

The Christ of Glory ascended to Heaven, having promised to prepare a place there for His faithful disciples. Ten days pass during which the bereaved ones dwell on their loss, ever mindful of the Passion and Crucifixion. Ten long days, then the Holy Spirit mysteriously enters their hearts there in that upper room in Jerusalem. Lo! a world-changing thing happens, the fulfillment of a promise given by Jesus at the Last Supper, "I will ask the Father and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you forever. I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."<sup>23</sup> That was Pentecost, the birthday of the Catholic Church. Militant, the Apostles marched onward towards eternal conquests, conquests for eternity; they were all of them saints now, full of the Fire, the Love, the Light from above. They were confronted by the world, the flesh and the devil; they contended with a jangle of pagan philosophies, a jungle of lascivious literature, spirits of evil in high places. It mattered naught that they were arrested, imprisoned, scourged, forbidden to preach: "With great power did they bear witness to the Resurrection of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, and grace was mighty among all the faithful."<sup>24</sup> Behold St. Peter, the dauntless herald of Christ, first in their ranks as on their lists.<sup>25</sup> He stands up in the midst of one hundred

<sup>22</sup> I Peter II, 25; V, 2

<sup>23</sup> John XIV, 16, 18, 20

<sup>24</sup> Acts IV, 33

<sup>25</sup> Matt. X, 2-4; Acts I, 13; Matt. XVI, 18; Luke XXII, 32; John XXI 15-18

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

and twenty disciples all of whom recognize his leadership.<sup>26</sup> He moves fearlessly about the streets of Jerusalem; not only does he work astounding miracles, more than ever is he aware of the divine authority entrusted to him. As converts multiply, he is opposed, arrested, cast into a dungeon, but an angel frees him.<sup>27</sup> Nothing daunted, he sets out to preach and baptize along the old familiar roads of Judea, across the sands of Samaria. An ancient tradition discovers him at length in Antioch, the first bishop of that great city; and later he labors in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Bithynia. . . .

“Gò ye therefore and teach all nations!” Given the world as a field for the faith of Christ, the gospel-seed must be scattered, the Church through apostolic labors expand into a larger society. That is sufficient explanation why Cephas did not remain all his life long in the Oriental provinces or even in the Greek. The Roman Empire, remember, was divided into far-flung districts: the Latin provinces occupied the western basin of the Mediterranean as far as the Adriatic: eastward stretched the Greek provinces as far as Mount Taurus, and there Greek languages and manners obtained: farther east lay the Oriental provinces with their medley of ancient rites and tongues. To Rome itself, the capital of that vast Empire, St. Peter was destined by Heaven itself to journey. Did not Caesar, the obscene spider, dwell there, drawing all within the range of his power. And were there not roads aplenty, Roman roads, over eight hundred in number, which led everywhere into the most remote provinces; a vast tattered web they started at the golden milestone in the Forum and reached out to seize and hold three continents. Now since all nations were included in his pastorate, St. Peter naturally and supernaturally needs must

<sup>26</sup> Acts I, 15

<sup>27</sup> Acts IV, XII

## *Saint Peter and the First Century*

go to their center. Christ's was the command, to be sure, but His Vicar's was the inspired response. Never was any resolve firmer, any step more determined, any adventure more divine than that of the Chief Shepherd to visit those "other sheep," show them the truth, win them into the true fold. At no time in his life was the great apostle more certain of his duty of conveying the truth he possessed than the day he turned his steps towards the two million pagans in the Imperial City. "O most blessed Apostle Peter, this was the city to which thou didst not shrink to come. The Apostle Paul, thy comrade in glory, was yet occupied in founding the Churches, and thou didst enter alone into that forest of wild beasts roaring furiously; thou didst commit thyself into that stormy ocean more boldly than when thou walkedst upon the waters to come to Jesus."

### *St. Peter in Rome*

Into the Porta Portese, about the year 42 A.D., came the Prince of the Apostles, having made his way over land and sea. Indubitably this arrival in the heart of the pagan world marked an event the importance of which cannot be overestimated. A handful of early converts already dwelt in the packed ghetto on the far bank of the Tiber. They were driven from Jerusalem perhaps during the first persecution and found their way to the Port of Rome. Jews of the Old Law had indeed settled in the capital fifty years before; but Aquila and Priscilla, Syrian Jews, were the first to form the nucleus of a Christian community. As time went on the name of Jesus was heard on the busy quays; the faith, like "a lamp shining in a squalid place," began to shed its rays in the poverty-stricken quarter. The Emperor Claudius little dreamt that over there at the foot of the Janiculum the foundations were being laid of an Empire which would outlast

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the immortal Rome of the Caesars. Yet, so it was to be. Had the elite of the city ventured as far as the Jew-ridden docks they could have rubbed elbows with the founder of this Empire of Christ. For St. Peter, indistinguishable from any poor countryman in his worn gaberdine, was ever busy about his Master's business. By day and night he moved among the mass of hovels and lodging houses; hour upon hour he spent near the wharves piled up with bales of merchandise; more precious still were those minutes during which he celebrated the Eucharist for his ever-growing flock, and bade them come to Christ, and be built upon Him as living stones upon a cornerstone.<sup>28</sup>

Word of all these doings went stealing forth to reach at last the ears of Claudius. Near the port, he was told by his spies, baleful activities of the new religion had been uncovered and should be reported at once to the Senate. For this Cult of the Hung, they assured Caesar, was "a foreign superstition," far more menacing than any and all of the fantastic religions vying one with the other in the imperial city. Amazing, in all truth, was the growth and spread of this secret worship of the Crucified! And Claudius might well be disturbed upon learning of the conversion of Philo, of Prudens, the Roman Senators, and his own two beautiful daughters, Praxedes and Prudentiana. Nay more, was not the city all agog over the fate of one Simon Magus, the magician, who publicly failing to raise a dead youth was straightway confounded by a Jewish newcomer working that very miracle. And when this same wily impostor attempted further to delude the people by claiming he would fly to heaven, he met with a deserved end, for at the prayer of the elect the demons left him and he was dashed bleeding to earth. These and other miraculous incidents bespeak nothing

<sup>28</sup> I Peter II, 5

## *Saint Peter and the First Century*

if not the all-embracing activity of the Chief Apostle planting the seed of the Church.

### *Prince of the Apostles*

The next glimpse we get of St. Peter is at the Council of Jerusalem — about 50 A.D. — a bishop among and over the bishops, ever preserving the divinely bestowed preëminence. All the Apostles, having preached the Gospel in the world, assembled in the Holy City; there were many things to be arranged, difficulties to be solved, matters that called for practical decision. A grave problem arose as to whether Gentile converts should submit to the Old Law and be circumcised! The point was fully discussed, arguments heard on both sides. Then St. Peter rose up, spoke at length, and gave his considered judgment:

“Men, brethren, you know that in former days, God made choice among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

“And God, Who knoweth the hearts, gave testimony, giving unto them the Holy Ghost, as well as to us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

“Now therefore, why tempt you God to put a yoke upon the necks of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we believe to be saved, in like manner as they also.”<sup>29</sup>

After that the other apostles kept silence until St. Paul and St. Barnabas endorsed all that the Head of the Church had said. And then St. James, the local bishop, clinched the argument in these words: “Men and brethren, Simon hath declared!” Could anything show more clearly that St. Peter was the acknowledged Vicar of Christ. . . .

Leaving the ancient city of David, the apostle had a world

<sup>29</sup> Acts XV, 7-11

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

of work to do. Heavy, indeed, were the obligations imposed by his call to feed the lambs and the sheep. His flock, exiles scattered from the heavenly Jerusalem,<sup>30</sup> included Asiatic as well as African and Western Christians. And it is likely the spokesman of Christ may have visited crowded communities of the Dispersion, since Parthians, Medes, Elamites and dwellers in Mesopotamia had been among his hearers on Pentecost. Try, then to picture St. Peter on those missionary journeys! The old fiery energy is tempered by the tone of apostolic dignity, an echo of which can be caught here and there in the New Testament. No person living in that age stands on so high a plane as this fearless Vicar of Christ; no fact in the history of those early days is more sublime than the unfaltering constancy of the Bishop of Rome. St. Peter, it is true, flashes across the later pages of Holy Writ like a traveler journeying over mountain peaks. You see him for an instant, then he vanishes from the sky-line, lost amid deep shadows and silences. Anon he reappears strong, tireless, carrying on in enduring effort. All that might serve us as a missionary log, the two Epistles, instead of giving place-names, provides a fragmentary story of fearless adventure for Christ. Yet all who run may see between the lines a great shepherd, sleepless, far-sighted, weather-beaten, guarding his scattered sheep, every one of them near to his heart.

### *Ordeal by Fire and Sword*

Days of bitter trial for the infant Church continue, almost without cease. Nero, last of the Caesarean family, ascended the throne in 54 A.D., and bestial is the word for his reign of over a decade. By his monstrous way of life he put himself beyond the limits of love or pity, indeed beyond all humanity. "Priam," he once declared in a black mood, "was lucky in

<sup>30</sup> I Peter IV, 10

## *Saint Peter and the First Century*

having seen the ruin of Troy"; and when told that Gaius used to quote the phrase, "When I am dead sink the whole world into flames," the savage Emperor laying bare his black soul replied, "Nay but while I live." Half-mad he set fire to the great city, then sought to escape the charge by putting the blame on the Christians, against whom his harlot Empress Poppoea had roused his personal spite. A destructive frenzy now seized Nero, all the hate felt by the pagan piled up in his ugly soul. *Non licet Christianos esse!* was the deadly order issued from his throne-room. One orgy of persecution followed another, onslaught after onslaught, the crime-maddened mob being urged on and upheld by the Emperor. Let a Roman historian etch the hideous scenes: "A vast multitude," writes Tacitus, "were convicted, not so much on the charge of making the conflagration, as of hating the human race. And in their deaths they were made the subjects of sport, for they were covered with the hides of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set fire to, and when the day declined were burned to serve for nocturnal lights. Nero had offered his own gardens for this exhibition, and also displayed a game of the circus, sometimes mingling in the crowd in the dress of a charioteer, sometimes standing in his chariot."<sup>31</sup> Thus did a brutal tyrant seal his power in infamy, and Rome was called the city, "drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus."<sup>32</sup>

Think of St. Peter during these terrible days, living in the thick of trial, going about strengthening his flock. The Vicar of Christ was destined himself to "bear witness" and become a victim in the gruesome festival! His Divine Master had made this very clear — "Amen, Amen I say to thee, when

<sup>31</sup> Annal. XV, 44

<sup>32</sup> Apoc. XVII, 6

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

thou wast younger, thou didst gird thyself, and didst walk where thou wouldst. But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee."<sup>33</sup> Ancient tradition describes the dire perils Peter faced, the pit of danger that yawned beneath his feet. The little hard-pressed flock in Rome, fearing that their Holy Father would be seized and the Church bereft of its head, were bent upon protecting him at all costs. Why, O, why must the shepherd be slain, his lambs and sheep scattered? Was that God's plan? Torn between thirst for martyrdom and hunger for the welfare of the flock, Peter at last yielded to their earnest request to flee the imperial city. But, behold, just beyond the Porta Capena the fugitive apostle met Jesus carrying His cross! "Lord, whither goest Thou?" he asked. And his Savior answered, "I go to Rome to be crucified again for thee." Thereupon St. Peter, touched to the quick, retraced his steps, was taken prisoner shortly afterward and cast into the Tullianum.

A willing captive for Christ, he won over the gaoler whom he baptized from the waters of a miraculous spring which burst out from the dry floor of the dungeon. At last in July, 64 A.D., *the* day arrived, the day that should witness the culmination of his faith, hope and love, the most intense act of his long life. Simon bar Jona, the man who had tried, failed and risen, and tried again, went straight forward, unfearingly, to wrest final victory on the cross. Led to the top of the Janiculum, he begged his executioners to let him die head downwards, deeming himself unworthy to die in the posture of his Master. An inscription in the Sacristy of St. Peter's indicates the spot where the Prince of the Apostles finished his course in frightful agony while the mad mob hooted and jeered at their victim. And the words so often on

<sup>33</sup> John XXI, 18

## *Saint Peter and the First Century*

his own lips were fulfilled to the letter: "For unto this are you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps."<sup>34</sup>

### *Seed of the Church*

As regards the activities of the other apostles, suffice it to say they too obeyed the Master's charge, and carried the Gospel to distant pagan races. Look at any map of the ancient world, if you would see the indelible bloodmarks of these heralds of Christ. St. Paul was beheaded in Rome very probably the same day St. Peter was crucified. St. Andrew died on a cross at Patrae in Achaia, while St. James, Bishop of Jerusalem, was put to the sword by Herod's soldiers. St. Philip preached in Samaria, gave bloody witness for His Master in Hieropolis; St. Bartholomew (Nathaniel) was flayed alive at Albanopolis, in Armenia; St. Thomas, the Apostle of India, after shedding his blood for the faith was buried in Edessa; St. James the Less is said to have been crucified while preaching the Gospel in Lower Egypt; St. Simon Zelotes is variously conjectured to have been crucified at Babylonia, or in the British Isles. St. Jude, sent by St. Thomas to the King of Edessa, embraced martyrdom at Berytus; and St. Matthew who preached in Parthia and Ethiopia met his death at Naddaber in the latter country. All, save St. John, laid down their lives for the sake of Christ; yet the beloved Apostle's long life was nothing if not a slow martyrdom. One and all, they kept God's testimonies, following in the footsteps of Him Who said: "Behold I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves. The servant is not greater than his Master. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If the world hate you, know ye that it hath hated Me before you. But yet rejoice not that

<sup>34</sup> I Peter II, 21

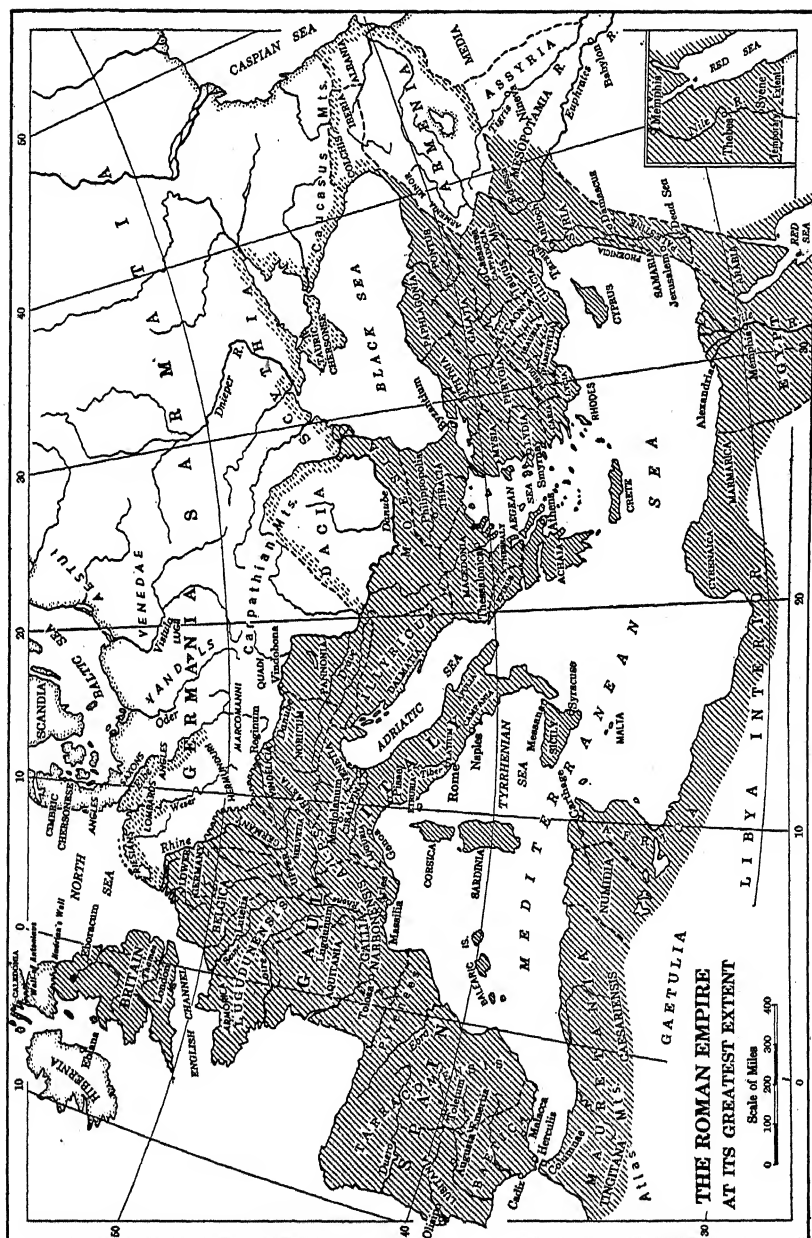
## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice in this that your names are written in heaven."<sup>35</sup>

A bird's-eye view will show how the Kingdom of Christ grew like the mustard seed in the Master's parable. Admittedly, as early as the reign of Nero it was a crime to be a Christian; indeed, from Nero to Galerius the faithful were regarded as outlaws, yet their numbers steadily increased. The Christians in Rome, Tacitus records, constituted a great multitude, and the cry at Thessalonica was that the Apostles had turned the world upside down. Old historic centers like Antioch, Athens, Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus, Caesarea were alive with faith, crowded with the followers of Christ. Indeed, the whole world appeared awake to the call of God, as the Church, meeting the need of the time, moved forward creatively and vigorously. Nor was it long ere the new religion, steadily recruited from every rank, counted persons who belonged to the imperial household. All this, of course, met with the most deadly opposition, but even the gates of Hell could not prevail. Nero, the suicide, was succeeded by other infernally brutal emperors who tried by fire and sword to uproot Christianity. Never a decade in which the infant Church was free from actual or impending persecution. The wickedness in high places was only too evident, and fearful was the power of the children of the father of lies. If their hearts were opened how many black thoughts, bitter hates, cruel fists, beastly urges could have been seen on every side. Jews disowned the followers of Christ, Roman judges called them an execrable sect, hired spies accused them of the deadliest crimes, while the riff-raff circulated vile caricatures in an attempt to befoul their holy religion.

In the face of such virulent persecution Linus succeeded Peter as Bishop of Rome, and was followed by Anacletus,

<sup>35</sup> Matt. X, 16; John XV, 20, 18; Luke X, 20



## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

then Clement who established deeper order and better discipline throughout the Church. All true followers of Christ regarded the Vicar of Christ as the universal bishop, fully aware that Rome held the Christian tradition. The faithful were subjected to fresh trials under the tyrant Domitian who himself met death at the hands of an assassin. Nerva took the royal reins and put Pope Clement to death for refusing to obey an imperial order to offer sacrifice to the gods of Rome. In 97, Evaristus succeeded Clement and guided the infant Church for eight years; St. John was still alive, the faith spreading rapidly, and devout Christians looked forward to the celebration of the centenary of the Birth of Christ. Just as her Divine Master predicted, the Rock of Peter stood firm, even when the angry waves were at their worst. As a matter of history the first twenty-five pontiffs form an unbroken line of martyrs and not until Pope St. Denis who died in 272 was there a single Bishop of Rome who failed to follow in the way of his Suffering Savior. But God writes the drama of the ages and men, even anti-Christian men, are but the actors. Come persecution, come prosperity, the vigor of the Church of Christ, like the power of her Founder, can never grow old, and we shall shortly see how the blood of the martyrs became the rich seed of a worldwide harvest for Heaven.

# Saint Justin Martyr

PREËMINENT APOLOGIST

# SAINT JUSTIN MARTYR AND THE SECOND CENTURY

<i>Roman Emperors</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>A.D.</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
TRAJAN, 98-117	Birth of Justin in ancient Sichem	100	ST. EVARISTUS, 99-105
	Letters, Ignatius of Antioch flourishes	107	ST. ALEXANDER, 105-115
	Justin travels through Palestine	115	ST. SIXTUS, 115-125
HADRIAN, 117-138	Calumny and persecution of Christians	117	ST. TELESPHORUS, 125-136
	Gnostic and Ebionite heresies afoot	126	
	Justin embraces the faith in Ephesus	130	
	Jerusalem destroyed by Hadrian	135	
ANTONINUS (Pius) 138-161	First Apologia to Antoninus Pius	138	ST. HYGINUS, 136-140
	Montanus spreads his false doctrine	140	ST. PIUS, 140-155
	Marcian the heretic goes to Rome	144	
	Gospel is preached in Gaul "Shepherd of Hermes"	150	ST. ANICETUS, 155-166
	Martyrdom of St. Polycarp.	155	
	<i>Disciplina arcani</i> — a fixed custom	160	
MARCUS AURELIUS, 161-180	Second Apologia to Marcus Aurelius	161	ST. SOTERIUS, 166-174
	Junius Rusticus, prefect of Rome	163	
	Parthian invasions	165	
	Justin dies a martyr in Rome	166	
	The Great Plague devastates the Empire	166	
	Polycarp martyred	169	ST. ELEUTHERIUS, 174-189
	Gospel is preached in Persia, Media, Parthia and Bactria	170	
COMMODIUS, 180-192	Irenaeus refutes the Gnostics	180	
	Church discipline against heresy	180	ST. VICTOR I, 189-199
	Birth of Origen	185	
SEPTIMUS SEVERUS, 193-211	The New Religion well known in the Roman Empire	190	
	Tertullian argues with heretics	195	ST. ZEPHYRINUS, 199-217
	End of the spell of peace	197	
	Council of Carthage	198	

## SAINT JUSTIN MARTYR AND THE SECOND CENTURY

### *A Son of Samaria*

Nearly a hundred years had passed since the birth of Christ, yet many heathen dwelt in the Holy Land. The district of Samaria, for example, remained much the same as the prophet Isaias described it — “the fading flower, the crown of the pride of the drunkards of Ephraim.” One thinks of Sicar, the town near Jacob’s well, where Jesus had said to the Samaritan woman, “If thou didst know the gift of God, and Who He is that sayeth to thee, ‘Give Me to drink,’ thou perhaps would have asked of Him and He would have given thee living water.”<sup>1</sup> Or of Sichem, lying in the pass from the seacoast to the Jordan, the place where Abraham and Jacob dwelt when they entered the Promised Land. Now it was in this immemorial region between Judea and Galilee that Justin saw the light of day. The child of paganism, his heart was as parched as the near-by desert, but he had a mind as open as his native province. Hunger for knowledge so possessed this young Samaritan that the schools of Flavia Neapolis (ancient Sichem) could not provide the things his soul longed for. So in early manhood Justin set out on his own in search of more light; he must face facts, gather experience, rub elbows with reality. Up and down picturesque Palestine the fledgling philosopher travelled, eager to meet any and every master who could add to his store. What a variety of philosophers, Jewish and Gentile, he encountered; imagine, too, the curious doctrines he came across in this never-say-die quest for truth.

<sup>1</sup> John III, 30

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

Justin, we shall see, had a long arduous way to go before he found the Gift of God. But most ardent was his desire for the truth, most sincere the pursuit that one day he would win the reward promised by the Teacher of teachers. "Come to Me . . . and I will refresh you. If you seek Me with your whole heart you shall surely find Me." That, in very brief, is the story of Justin's heaven-guided Odyssey which took him into many strange highways and byways. In the first stage of his journey the young Samaritan came in contact with Jews full of zeal to win him over to their cause. They instructed him in the Tablets of the Law, told him of a great leader to come, even hinted at their plot to throw off the Roman yoke and restore Israel to Jehovah. The time was at hand, they assured him, when a political Messiah would rule from Jerusalem, whither all would hasten with gifts and oblations to be offered on Mount Sion. Their burning hate of Rome was equalled only by their intense antipathy towards the followers of the Crucified. Had not the Nazarene, Whom these Christians called the Son of God, created a schism in Jewish ranks, and were not these same Christians trying to substitute an absurd law of love for the old law of fear? Though these haters had not a good word for the new religion, Justin, always exercising his faculties in acquiring knowledge, soon found out for himself — many things! Facts spoke louder than lies, and example proved more potent than any number of impassioned charges. The little flock he came to know were kindly, helpful, modest, lovers of neighbors. They bore one another's burdens bravely, their thoughts were above in Heaven where dwelt their Savior; they put into actual practice the Sermon on the Mount which Justin discerned as the very keystone of true civilization. What is more, these Christians continued steadfast in their faith

## *Saint Justin Martyr and the Second Century*

despite Jewish hatred, even in the face of fiendishly brutal persecution engineered by Rome's all-powerful Emperors.

### *Foes of Christ*

Penal times for the Church would best describe the century in which Justin lived. During his childhood in Samaria the Emperor Nerva was savagely harassing the followers of Christ for refusing to join the pagan cults. Trajan, his successor, frowned harshly upon Christians, hinted at their crime in doing honor to "the Name" and permitted bloody persecutions. An imperial agent, the younger Pliny, who had executed many Christians, was compelled to report to the Caesar that the temples of the Roman gods were being forsaken, so rapidly was the new "superstition" gaining ground in the country places as well as in the cities. And now as Justin followed the pilgrim way, Hadrian (117-138) was penalizing the faithful by rescript, regarding their *caritas* as subversive of all that Rome stood for. None the less, they continued to grow in amazing numbers; people of both sexes, of all ages and of every rank became Christians. One needed only half an eye to see these fearless folk practiced social changes nothing short of revolutionary, and that in the face of bitter opposition. On acquaintance with these unsung heroes of the faith our pagan student gained deep insight into their hidden life. His views, however, were still cramped, but as he continued earnestly in search of light, and again more light, Heaven itself broadened his vision so that eventually the young philosopher laid hold on truth itself. Justin, remember, from the very outset of his career displayed ardent love of truth, his heart and mind were like the wings of a bird forever beating, seeking peace. "Birds," said the inspired

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

writer, "resort unto their like, so truth will return to them that practice her."<sup>2</sup>

The Samaritan, still in his twenties, journeyed hither and yon until he arrived in Ephesus. This flourishing Greek city had echoed the footsteps of St. Paul and formed the center from which St. John once governed the Church in Asia Minor. Many Jews and pagans in these parts, zealots to their heart's core, appeared only too ready to engage the ardent stranger in argument after argument. Inevitably in the course of heated debate Justin heard the same old foolish stories that had given him spiritual pain in Palestine. By this time, however, the keen observer was nowise misled, knowing as he did the motives behind many of these bitter charges. The plain fact that Christians abandoned luxury and ornament in dress did not make them popular with pagan tradesmen; their refusal to offer public sacrifices, as Pliny had observed, hurt the pockets of the greedy graziers; they eschewed the vile plays in the theatres so the professional showmen were irate, being out of pocket. Anybody with an ounce of brains could see the why and wherefore of these things. No! Justin was not easily befooled. Or bedevilled either. All this wild rumor about the followers of Christ being guilty of atheism, anarchism and disloyalty to the state proved to be sheer nonsense; it was on the same low level with the wicked accusations of incest and cannibalism, of magic and witchcraft that stupid Jewish alarmists shouted in the back-alleys of Jerusalem and Joppa. The real facts were these — Christians served among the most loyal soldiers in the imperial armies, but they proved themselves still better *milities Christi*, and the Church could count numerous soldier-martyrs. Did not events prove that the more those stalwarts of the faith were mowed down by their brutal persecutors

<sup>2</sup> Eccclus. XXVII, 10

## *Saint Justin Martyr and the Second Century*

the more numerous they became? "While I was yet a follower of the Platonic philosophy," Justin wrote, "and I heard the Christians pursued by calumny, and saw them stand intrepid before death and all formidable things, I thought to myself that such persons could not be given to vice and voluptuousness."<sup>3</sup> In fact, the sight of brave martyrs sustained by the Invisible God had brought about the conversion of more than one pagan acquaintance; and this was to be the reason for the philosopher's own conversion.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Light of Life*

Loyal to his principle of searching out facts, Justin exulted in every advance in the direction of truth. Yes, truth, more truth, and again more truth, was what he wanted. One day, wending his way through the old city, he met a venerable man who spoke deep words of wisdom and urged him on to further truth by a close study of the Prophets of Israel. Obedient, the Samaritan stranger coned the worn Hebrew rolls until he was rewarded by a glimpse of the direction in which they pointed, the character they limned of the Suffering Savior. The long stretches of spiritual emptiness he had travelled were left behind. New lights, hitherto undreamed of, gave the tireless student a better perspective; besides, as he came to know the Christians more intimately, he began to grasp the ideas and ideals they professed. Now, more than ever before, their ways of life grew fixed in his mind; and he was able to see eye to eye with them in the light of Eternity. Thus the whole business of salvation slowly dawned in the eager soul of Justin. He knew that God's cause was truly served by these guileless humble people so hated by the evil-minded. What sublime courage he had seen them dis-

<sup>3</sup> Justin, Apol. I, 26

<sup>4</sup> Justin, Apol. II, 12

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

play in the face of vulgar insults and catcalls of derision! How faithfully they observed the Gospel-word! How really they loved one another, avoiding temptation in every form! And all for the sake of Christ, their Way, their Truth and their Life. Small wonder then as he sat at the feet of those doers of the Word he caught their spirit — and straightway decided he could no longer remain a pagan. The busy seeker had crossed the desert, had stopped at a few halting places to rest and think, but now the City of God was in full view. Given the grace of faith, Justin in the very flower of his manhood embraced with joy the religion of the Crucified, secretly vowing himself to the service of the All-True.

Attired in the robe of a philosopher, the valiant convert set out to teach the Gospel. His method was to use philosophy as a stepping stone to higher truths, and persuade his hearers of the validity of Christian doctrine. Jews and pagans flocked to hear him argue, exhort, rebuke, convince in season and out of season. Ere long he engaged in a famous controversy with the learned Jew, Trypho, and the debate lasted two days. This "dialog," as it is called, touched upon the Old and the New Law, the Prophets and the Messiah, the life and teachings of the Man of Nazareth! Listen now to the Christian apologist. "Just as there were also false prophets in the time of the holy prophets that were among you," Justin argued, "so there are among us many false teachers of whom Our Lord bade us beware beforehand, so that we should never be at a loss, being aware that He foreknew what would happen to us after His resurrection from the dead, and His ascent to Heaven. For He said that we must be slain and hated for His Name's sake and that many false prophets and false Christs would come forward in His Name, and would lead many astray. And this is the case. For many have taught what is godless and blasphemous and

## *Saint Justin Martyr and the Second Century*

wicked, falsely stamping their teaching with His Name, and have taught what has been put in their minds by the unclean spirit of the devil, and teach it until now. . . .”

As Justin pressed his points, one after another, he used the Old and New Testaments like a double-edged sword to drive home the truth he had found in Jesus. The law of Moses, he told Trypho, has given way to the law of Christ. The worship of Jesus is in true conformity with the worship of the true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And the true Israel is to be found only among the Christians to whom belong the promise of the Covenant. “There is not one nation of men,” Justin asserted, “be it Greek or barbarian, or called by any name you will, whether it lives in the swamps or wants a roof, or lives in tents and feeds the flocks, from the midst of which do not ascend prayers and thanks to the Father and Creator of the universe, in the Name of Jesus Crucified.”<sup>5</sup> Surely the argumentative Trypho had more than met his match and emerged a poor second in this great controversy; better still, Justin’s “Dialog” was to lift the black veil of ignorance and ill will from the minds and hearts of multitudes, generation after generation.

### *The Hour of Darkness*

In the days that followed the historic debate, Jews as well as Christians were tried in the furnace of affliction. The long-hatched rebellion against Roman power flared up fiercely in Jerusalem under the bloodthirsty fanatic, Bar-cochab. This man’s hatred for Christian no less than Roman was nothing if not Satanic; during his brief span of dictatorship, 132 to 133, he massacred hundreds of the faithful for rejecting his claim as the Messiah and refusing to join in his revolt. Hadrian, the Emperor, used a red hand to quell this savage

<sup>5</sup> *Dialog with Trypho*, n. 117

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

affair, sending armies that ruthlessly wiped out the rebels along with all the residents of Jerusalem. A Roman colony, *Elia Capitolina* was established on the smoking ruins of the Holy City, and the Jewish nation came to a sad end. Five years later, in 138, the Emperor disappeared from the earthly scene. His successor, Antoninus Pius, proved himself a sincere old Roman, humanitarian and tolerant to a degree, yet one never knew when the ruling powers in the imperial city might take action. The Christian faith, of course, was still regarded as "*religio illicita*," so its members dwelt in unpredictable peril, a sword suspended over their heads. Spies sought them out, mobs were likely to rise against them any day. In the meantime Justin, nothing daunted, moved from place to place, disputing and teaching until he reached his journey's end — Rome. Pope Hyginus, of Greek birth, sat in the Chair of Peter, and the Eternal City housed a large Greek population together with provincials from every part of the Empire. There was nothing else practicable for a follower of Christ, like Justin, but to go on there doing what God willed and duty imposed upon him. Ever alert, the fearless philosopher characteristically rubbed elbows with all and sundry, while he kept his missionary goal in mind and worked towards it as a lover labors to make known the truth and beauty of his beloved. An able counsel for Christ, he argued with the pagans,<sup>6</sup> proving to the satisfaction of many the truth and beauty of the new religion. The philosopher, Crescens, was confounded, likewise Marcian, the heretic, and many Greek theorists. He discoursed eloquently on

<sup>6</sup> By Pagan, *Paganus*, should be understood "civilians" as opposed to "*miles*," that is, soldiers. Like as not the term *paganus* originated in the slang of the barrack room where soldiers dubbed civilians "rustics," "villagers," "*pagani*." The non-Christian was "a mere civilian" in the sight of God, but the Christian a soldier *miles Christi*, bound by the *sacramentum* of his Baptismal vow.

## *Saint Justin Martyr and the Second Century*

the unity of God, on the glory of the Book of Psalms, on the Resurrection, but of the inner Christian mysteries not a word, for the *disciplina arcani* had become a fixed custom and the time for unveiling those sacred things to prying strangers had not yet arrived.

The day did come in the year 138 when dark danger loomed once again on the horizon. "Oh! unhappy times," runs a contemporary inscription for Alexander, the martyr, "when, in the midst of sacred things, and occupied with our prayers we cannot be safe even in the bowels of the earth; what more miserable than life, and what more miserable than death, when we cannot be buried by our friends."<sup>7</sup> Unhappy times they were indeed, for vile rumors and calumnies continued to spread abroad like wildfire and another general persecution seemed imminent. In the hope that his brethren might receive humane treatment from the public authorities, Justin made a great resolve. He would match his pen against the sword; yes, he would tell the Emperor himself and the Senate of the actual beliefs and doings of the Christians. Thus was written the "First Apology," as priceless a record of early ecclesiastical practices and events as has come down through the centuries. "Your rulers," Justin boldly informed Antoninus, "are partners with thieves, loving bribes, following after a reward. But if you do know any such even among us, yet at least do not blaspheme, or try to misinterpret the Scriptures and Christ because of such men." There is no similarity, declared the apologist, between the Eucharistic Mystery and the abominable rites of the Thyestean banquets; nothing in the Sacrament of Baptism that resembles in any way the corrupt ideas held by pagans utterly unacquainted with the sacred ceremonies. With power and clarity the fearless defender of the faith went on to stress the points

<sup>7</sup> Arringhi, *Subterranean Rome*, book 3, c. 22

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

which deserve to be memorized because they sum up the great apologia.

The Saviour of the World, Jesus Christ, is truly the Son of God as the ancient prophecies unmistakably point out.

The accusations of impiety and civil enmity hurled at the followers of the Nazarene are utterly false, utterly unfounded.

The Emperor, therefore, should recall all penal decrees against the Christians, as beseems a ruler well known for his sense of justice and spirit of fair play.

Though a "Minor Peace of the Church" existed at this time, there were black days too, for which Justin held the Emperor responsible. But persecution or no persecution the Christian community thrived in unity and organized government, and as the beautiful liturgy blossomed the power of Christian life made itself felt everywhere.

### *Scribes of the Kingdom*

Judging from his activities, Justin had become more and more apostolic-minded. Jesus had indeed fed this travel-weary Samaritan with the bread of life and understanding, had given him the water of wisdom to drink. In return the grateful philosopher sought to walk in the footsteps of his Unfailing Friend, dispensing the oil of charity and the wine of Christian cheer to all who came within his reach. He founded and conducted in Rome a famous school of Christian instruction, "endeavoring," as he writes, "to discourse in accordance with the Scriptures, not from love of money, or vainglory or of pleasure." Able pagan teachers continued to challenge him in public debate; these he met one after another, and not a few were won over to the true faith.

Justin, however, was not alone working with pen and voice, by word and deed, for the defense of the truth he cherished above all things on earth. Though much has been written about the preëminent apologist, there were

## *Saint Justin Martyr and the Second Century*

admittedly many other champions of Christianity in these days: as early as 120, Barnabas had published an epistle; in 124, Aristides wrote an *Apologia* in Athens; in 160, a pupil of Justin's, named Tatian, vigorously attacked paganism in Antioch; in 170, Ignatius wrote famous letters to the faithful in Asia. And while valiant missionaries went east and west, founded churches and confounded wily pagans, their brilliant co-workers, Athanagoras and Theophilus, Appollinaris and Miltiades, were explaining the Christian religion and answering every false charge against the brethren; the mystical Shepherd of Hermes also appeared about this time, together with many other authors of doctrinal treatises. Who can deny that such scribes of the school of Christ virtually wrote at the risk of their lives? Without doubt many of them had the pen snatched from their holy hands as they went forth to welcome the sword of martyrdom.

One of these heroes for Christ was Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, whose "Acts" are the oldest account of a martyrdom we possess. A great preacher, this "gray prince of Asia" incurred the hatred of his pagan townsmen who arrested him and brought him before the Proconsul. An unforgettable scene followed when the chief actors, tyrant and martyr, met face to face.

But when the Governor pressed him and said, "Take the oath and I will let you go, revile Christ," Polycarp said, "For eighty and six years have I been His servant, and He hath done me no wrong, and how can I blaspheme my King Who saved me." But when he persisted again and said, "Swear by the genius of Caesar," he said, "if you vainly suppose that I will swear by the genius of Caesar, as you say, and pretend that you are ignorant who I am, listen plainly—I am a Christian." . . . And the Proconsul said, "I have wild beasts, I will deliver you to them unless you change your mind." And he said, "Call for them, for change of mind

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

from better to worse is change we may not make; but it is good to change from evil to righteousness." And he said again to him, "I will cause you to be consumed by fire, if you despise the beasts, unless you repent." But Polycarp said, "You threaten with the fire that burns for a time, and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. But why are you waiting? Come, do what you will."<sup>8</sup>

At the stake, the aged hero gave thanks for drinking the cup of Christ. The flames did not destroy him, so the savage pagans stabbed him to death, then burned his body. But the Christians of Smyrna gathered up his relics, "more precious than the richest jewels or gold," and hid them in a secret place whither the faithful repaired as to a sacred shrine to celebrate his birthday in Heaven, the day of his martyrdom. News of this soul-stirring event spread through the length and breadth of the Empire with amazing repercussions. The power of such heroic example, multiplied by other martyrs beyond count, worked mightily for the faith. After all, was it not the power of God Who chose to shake the Empire to its very foundations, and change pagan *Roma immortalis* into Christian *Roma aeternalis*, the city set apart as a dwelling place of His Son's Vicar.

### *Stoic Versus Christian*

Marcus Aurelius, son-in-law of Antoninus Pius, began to rule in 161 A.D. and the Empire reached its greatest heights. The grandeur that was Rome, he realized, must be jealously guarded lest it too fade away like the glory that was Greece. Sharp of vision, the new Emperor viewed with pagan alarm the growth of the new religion; cruel and unscrupulous he resolved to destroy it utterly—root, stem and branch.

<sup>8</sup> Eusebius

## *Saint Justin Martyr and the Second Century*

Though Marcus Aurelius had donned the mantle of the philosopher at the age of eleven, no Emperor showed less power of understanding the religion of his Christian subjects. The Church was, in his baleful eyes, the public menace; her anti-pagan doctrine cropped up in every place; her children bade fair to change the face of the whole earth. A Stoic to the hard core of his heart, the Emperor cynically regarded the faith of Christians as outright fanaticism; their superb aplomb before cruel judges only obstinacy; their cheerful acceptance of martyrdom just "a tragic show!" Pity had no place in the emotions of this tyrant who was possessed by the pride of life and the pomp of circumstance. The torments borne by the sixteen-year-old Ponticus and the courage of the gentle girl Blandina left him cold. When Pottinus, the aged bishop, brutally treated by his jailers, died after two days in prison, Marcus Aurelius was as little affected as when he heard of the heroic martyrdom of that other great shepherd, Polycarp. No! all Christians, high and low, must be wiped out to a man, and with them everything they held dear — the infinite value of the immortal soul; the equality of all men, slave and noble alike; the dignity of labor, even slave labor; the blessings of spiritual poverty. Nonsense, all of it, imbecile, seditious, blasphemous nonsense! By all the Roman gods, he the sage and warrior would resort to the iron law of power and succeed where his predecessors had so dismally failed. *Non licet Christianos esse!*

### *Justin the Martyr*

One gory day in Rome, Urbinus, the prefect, put three Christians to death and this without a word of warning. It was a stab in the dark! They had done no evil; they were upright decent citizens. Bad as things were, Justin took up their cause and wrote a vigorous appeal to the Emperor,

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

asking for imperial interposition and stoutly defending the Christian religion. The *Apologia*, however, was to no purpose, since words were inept, philosophy impotent to rouse a sense of justice in the Stoic ruler. Marcus Aurelius did nothing to curb the mobs, nor did he raise his little finger to bid his magistrates be fair and just. Nowise deterred by the calamities, earthquake and inundation visiting his domains, nor even by the great plague of 166 from which his Empire never recovered, the Stoic ruler continued to persecute his Christian subjects. Let the sword fall where it would until the enemy of the Roman state was done away with. Outbursts of hatred became more frequent and this, the fourth great persecution, proved one of the most dreadful in the history of the Catholic Church. Her children suffered both from popular fury and from the government in their all-out war against God and His Christ. The faithful in the churches of Lyons and Vienne, tried in the furnace, wrote heart-stirring letters to the brethren in Asia Minor. And as if torture and death were not enough, vile rumors piled up against the Christians because their assemblies were private; the same old slanderous charges of incest and child-murder and kindred abominations were propagated, and what is worse, believed by the mob.

Justin, caught up in the mad rush, must have felt that the end was near. The dauntless defender who had more than once succeeded in staying the persecution of his brethren, now found himself in the thick of the pagan press. Was he trembling with fear, would he capitulate? The answer is, no! This man who had won the truth the hard way, would never part with it, never forsake the Christian faith, come fire, come sword. All said and done, Justin deemed himself nothing more than God's servant, privileged indeed to make the Church of Christ known and loved. By now he realized

## *Saint Justin Martyr and the Second Century*

that only one thing counted — loyalty to the truth that was in Christ Jesus. For the rest, God Who had been his arm in the morning of life would prove his salvation in time of trouble. When the red day dawned in 166 it found the Christian philosopher ready for the worst. Justin was arrested in company with other heroes of Christ — Chariton, Euelpistus from Cappadocia, Hierax from Iconium, Paeon, Liberianus, Valerianus and Charitina! All were brought before the Prefect of Rome, accused of crime against the state, urged to renounce the new religion. The brave little band stood their ground unflinchingly: "We are Christians, God's will be done. . . ." Led out to execution, they commended their souls into the hands of their Maker. Why, to face death for the sake of Christ would be the achievement of a lifetime, the proof final of their fidelity, the surest augury of eternal victory. So we part with Justin, most truly the Martyr, rejoicing in the Lord, eager to seal with his blood the pledge given long ago to his Divine Master. Gladly would he die, as he had lived, for the Good Samaritan Who had found him not so long ago spiritually wounded and half-dead by life's wayside and was now leading him to His Own Inn.

Time is a great umpire inasmuch as it shows how Divine Providence always cares for the Church. It mattered little, therefore, that God's holy ones were opposed by the most powerful political organization the world has ever seen; less, that they ran afoul of the greatest line of rulers known in ancient or modern history. Indeed, every Christian martyrdom served as a magnet of Heaven to draw many outsiders into the fold of the faith. Marcus Aurelius, like the earlier tyrants, found his subtlest pagan aims vain, himself thwarted in all his evil plans. Under Commodus, the Stoic's despicable son, there were, to be sure, fresh outbursts of persecution,

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

but it was clear that *Pax Romana* would never be won by such methods. For the Church, rising like a young giant from each fall, waxed stronger year by year. Pope Eleutherius (174-189) planned to extend the faith in remote Britain, and missionaries carried the gospel to far-off Persia, Media, Parthia and Bactria. Even more wonderful than the rapid growth of the new religion was the way Christians clung to the Gospel-instilled idea with regard to the World, an ideal clearly outlined in the famous "Epistle to Diognetus."<sup>9</sup> Study the following singularly beautiful passage if you would see their intensity of faith, their loyalty to the Church, their high spiritual standards. Says the author who lived at the close of the second century, "Christians dwell in their native cities, yet as sojourners; they share in everything as citizens and endure all things as aliens; every foreign country is to them a fatherland, and every fatherland a foreign soil. . . . They live in the flesh, but not according to the flesh. They pass their time on earth but exercise their citizenship in Heaven. They obey the enacted laws, and by their private lives they overcome the law. They love all men, and are persecuted of all men. They are unknown, and yet condemned; they are put to death, and yet raised to life. They are beggars, and yet make many rich. They lack all things, and yet abound in all things." Thus we find the Christians, owning to marked characteristics, united by bonds of faith and the cords of love. "You are the light of the world," the Divine Master had told them. "You are the salt of the earth." They well knew what work lay ahead in the pagan world, being mindful of St. Paul's counsel, "For behold your calling, brethren, how that many not wise after the flesh, not many mighty, nor many noble — are called: but God chose the foolish things of the world, that He might

<sup>9</sup> *Epistle to Diognetus*, chaps. 5-6

*Saint Justin Martyr and the Second Century*

put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the earth that He might put to shame the things that are strong."<sup>10</sup> Such in very brief is the story of God's good and faithful servants dwelling in the midst of demoralizing dangers and virulent persecutions.

<sup>10</sup> I Cor. I, 26-27



# Saint Anthony

FOUNDER OF MONASTICISM

# SAINT ANTHONY AND THE THIRD CENTURY

<i>Roman Emperors</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>A.D.</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
SEPTIMUS SEVERUS, 195-211	Clement's famous school in Alexandria	200	ST. ZEPHYRINUS, 199-217
	Martyrdom under Septimus Severus	210	
CARACELLA, 211-217	Barrack Emperors take over	211	
HELIOGABALUS, 218-222	The Mad Emperor is tolerant	219	ST. CALIXTUS I, 217-222
ALEXANDER SEVERUS 222-235	Alexander's fellow-feeling for Christians	223	ST. URBAN I, 222-230
	School of Caesaria	232	ST. PONTIANUS, 230-235
MAXIMINUS, THRACIAN, 235-238	Persecution raises its ugly head	235	ST. ANTERUS, 235-236
GORDIAN 238-244	Dionysius heads School of Alexandria	238	ST. FABIAN, 236-250
	Growth of Church's organized government	240	
	Anthony's forbears dwell in Egypt	242	
PHILIP THE ARABIAN 244-249	Period of tolerance under Philip	244	
DECIUS, 249-251	Cyprian writes on Church government	248	
	Systematic attempt to destroy faith	249	
	Anthony born in Coma, in the Fayum	250	
GALLUS, 251-253	Novatian antipope seeks power	251	ST. CORNELIUS, 251-253
	Emperor recalls exiled Bishops	251	ST. LUCIAN, 253-254
VALERIAN, 253-260	Pope Sixtus beheaded upon his throne	257	ST. STEPHEN I, 254-257
	Cyprian a martyr for the faith	258	ST. SIXTUS II, 257-258
GALLIENUS, 260-268	Paul of Thebes, first hermit	260	ST. DIONYSIUS, 259-268
	Growth of Church rapid and continuous	260	
	Cessation of persecution	260	
	Dionysius goes into exile in Libya	261	
	Sabellianism condemned	266	
CLAUDIUS, 268-270	Goths enter Dacia	270	ST. FELIX I, 269-274
	Constantine's birth	274	ST. EUTYCIAN, 275-283
DIOCLETIAN, 284-305	Anthony enters the desert	285	ST. CAIUS, 283-296
	Manichees in Africa	296	ST. MARCELLINUS, 296-304
	Last formidable persecution	303	

## SAINT ANTHONY AND THE THIRD CENTURY

### *Lights and Shadows*

North Africa in this age was a hidden garden of the Church, watered with the blood of martyrs, and destined to fructify after the long period of Christian travail. Along her flourishing coasts great cities thrived, widely known for their splendid schools and magnificent libraries. Latin Christian literature originated in such centers, especially in Alexandria and Carthage, whose renowned teachers proved to be the greatest writers of the period. Names like Clement, a Father of the Church, and his brilliant but erratic pupil Origen, Cyprian and Dionysius the Great, spread the glory of their faith throughout the Empire. Able bishops, apostolic catechists, dauntless Christians exemplified the truth of St. Paul's words, "To them that love God all things work together unto good, to such as, according to His purpose, are called to be saints."<sup>1</sup> Those wonderful Christians! What a privilege it must have been to hear and know them. What a thrill to see the Church of God growing in holiness, refusing to compromise with error or imperialism. Very true, but there was another side to the picture, showing hard lines of heresy, black shadows of persecution. By spreading their heresies far and wide, Plotinus in Egypt and Rome, Montanus, a rigorist in Phrygia, Novation in Italy, threatened the peace and unity of the Church. Early in the century the Emperor, Septimus Severus, launched a bitter campaign of extermination; he sent magistrates to spy upon all subjects, forbade all conversions, issued edicts to do away with the new religion. In Carthage two tender women, Perpetua and Felicitas, displayed such magnificent martyr-spirit that their example

<sup>1</sup> Romans VIH, 28

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

was followed by a long line of heroes down the years. "Nor are virgins," writes St. Cyprian, "absent from this number. And even among the boys there is a virtue greater than their age, which exceeds their years in the glory of their confession."

Across the Great Sea, the mob-ridden Empire seemed to have gone completely mad and murder was the order of the day. The Barrack Emperors ruled by the will or whim of the army, most of them hailing from Gaul, Spain, Britain, Syria, even Persia. And while a few displayed broad ideas, several of low birth and foreign ways proved savage and intolerant. The first of these, Caracalla, who chose the Gaulish long-mantle rather than the Roma toga, bitterly opposed the Church. Six years later the Syrian, Heliogabalus (218-22), sprang into the royal saddle and, wonderful to relate, showed himself friendly to the Christians, for he recognized the power of their faith. The "mad Emperor," as the Romans called him, was succeeded in 222 by Alexander, a devout excellent ruler who went so far as to place the image of Jesus among his household gods. No sooner had the next Emperor, Maximinus Thracian (235-238), seized the reins than he incited bloody violence against his Christian subjects, bringing to the land only disorder and bloodshed. Gordian (238-244) favored the followers of Christ, as did his successor, Philip the Arabian (244-249). Next to nothing is known about the latter's conversion, though he has been called the first Christian Emperor; it is certain, however, that he too seized and lost his power by violence.

### *Youth of a Hermit*

Half the turbulent century had passed when Anthony of Egypt was born in Coma, in the Fayum. His parents, opulent Christians of noble stock, prized "beyond gold and rubies" their Christian heritage and rejoiced in the glories of

## *Saint Anthony and the Third Century*

the African Church. The year of Anthony's birth, 250 A.D. is well worth remembering as the time when pagan Rome is trying to make a last stand against the forces of Christ. As a boy, Anthony attended a Christian school where the program probably included grammar, rhetoric and logic. These subjects, however, appealed to him far less than things moral and spiritual, so instead of seeking what is called a liberal education, he addressed himself to a higher course. Thus early the youth chose "the more difficult way," aiming for self-knowledge and self-discipline. The result was that he grew up to manhood self-denying in his habits, most dutiful towards his parents, and deeply devoted to his holy religion. Attendance at Mass, reading of the scriptures and the divine office drew him daily closer to Christ, and he waxed strong, like his beloved Master, in wisdom and grace before God and men. At the same time the grown-up could not but hear reports of pagan crimes in the chaotic outside world.<sup>2</sup> Africa itself, he perceived, was really a small-scale Empire, posed against the background of persecution. Near his own Egyptian homeland, Cyprian, the holy bishop of Carthage, and Dionysius, the great bishop of Alexandria, had run afoul of the Emperor's bloody agents. These athletes of Christ were the pride and glory of the African Church; their vivid epistles, read throughout the land, told how their flocks were disbanded, lacerated by scourging, some thrown into loathsome dungeons, others condemned to slave labor in the murky mine pits. The Proconsul Paternus had addressed Cyprian, "The most sacred emperors Valerius and Gallianus have deigned to write to me ordering that those who do not follow the Roman religion, should at least acknowledge the Roman ceremonies." To Dionysius the perfect, Aemillean declared, "You will be sent to the Libyan region . . . you will

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Cyprian's words, "*senuisse jam mundus*," "the world is worn out."

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

not be allowed to hold meetings or to enter the places you call cemeteries." Well, both bishops, converts from paganism, kept the faith and went on fighting the good fight until they finished their course loyal to the end. Cyprian gained a martyr's crown in 258 under Valerian. Dionysius twice exiled was recalled in 261 by the same Emperor and died three years later.

Anthony could not help seeing how badly the Roman world needed change of mind and heart, needed redemption. All the old austerity, all the ancient virtues, especially piety, had vanished in the wake of the carnal, murderous ways of men. Orientals penetrated everywhere. Jews were multiplying despite the pogroms. German barbarians overran the provinces. Rome, certainly, was on the verge of ruin; nothing could save the Empire but the religion of Christ. When things seemed at their worst God inspired Anthony to prepare himself for a gigantic adventure. His life work would be to lay the foundations of monasticism and enable the Church to civilize and Christianize the declining Empire. Now there lived in Egypt holy men, hermits, several of whom Anthony was wont to visit in the neighborhood of Coma. The young man, attracted to their heavenly life, secretly desired to share their ascetic practices, their mental prayer and severe penance. And just when Anthony's mind was all for imitating them by entering God's secret service, the death of his good parents left him alone with an only sister. Rich and young, he nevertheless yearned to be rid of his great inheritance and travel in the footprints of his beloved Redeemer. Aiming to prepare himself for religious life, he sought greater seclusion so that he could pursue his meditations and give himself up wholly to the life of the spirit. One day at Mass Anthony was listening attentively to the gospel — "If thou wilt be perfect go and sell all thou hast." The winged

## *Saint Anthony and the Third Century*

words pierced his heart, stuck there like a dart. Six months later, having sold all his property, he arranged that his sister be amply provided for and gave the rest of his gold to the poor.

### *Tap-Roots in the Sands*

At last he was free to obey the holy urge that had so long ruled his eager soul. Not far from Coma was an old tomb which he took over and there began the practice of ascetism. He did not spare his body ever so little but labored with his hands, mindful of St. Paul's word, "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat."<sup>3</sup> By degrees secrets of prayer dawned in his heart, hidden paths opened towards holiness, so that he dwelt as in some strange happy realm. Laboriously, brick by brick, the young man built up the strong foundations of his soul, and as the days passed he increased in spiritual stature. "The saint is simply a human being whom personal holiness transforms into a personality reflecting the radiant being of Our Lord. He shifts his center of attraction from "self" to God, and by dint of grace seeks only to be Christ-like, to put on the Beloved." From the time Anthony entered the desert, nay earlier, he had so lived, serving no will of his own, only God's, and that in all things; the inner driving force of grace did the rest, enduing him with that strength for sweetness and untiring sacrifice which he manifested to his fellow-men. There is nothing surprising, therefore, in his village friends finding Anthony a paragon of "refined manners, gentleness, long-suffering, continuance in prayers, long vigils, fastings." But the thing that impressed them most was his burning personal devotion towards Christ and his unfailing love of neighbor.

Anthony, "God's beloved," made such strides in the higher life that his soul ached for further spiritual adventure. In

<sup>3</sup> II Thess. III, 10

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the year 285, he set out for an abode where he was destined by Heaven to spend the rest of his long life. Odd that at the age of thirty-five the holy man should abandon a Roman world morally bankrupt but Anthony did so at the call of God. Crossing the Nile, he fled alone into the desert, journeying on till he reached a mountain, *Der el Memun*, near the east bank of the great river. There he found an old deserted fort infested with snakes and took possession, after laying in bread for six months. There was a well in the fort, so Anthony locked himself in the stronghold where he dwelt for twenty years, never seeing a human face. Old friends pursued him, just as before, anxious to see the hermit whom they still cherished as a brother. Though they remained outside the gloomy place for days and nights never a glimpse of him did they get, but they heard noises and disputes and feared for their hermit-friend's life. "He cared for them more than for the evil spirits, and coming at once near the door, he bade them go away and not fear; 'for,' he said, 'devils make all this feint to alarm the timid. Ye, then, sign yourselves and depart in confidence, and let them make game of themselves.' "

### *The Desert Blooms*

All these days in the desert while Anthony girded himself for his great work, the Empire enjoyed comparative peace, perhaps the false peace of exhaustion. Valerian, the persecutor, warring with the Persians, had been taken prisoner in 260, whereupon his son, Gallienus, seized the throne and gave orders that persecution should cease. His edict, which treated bishops as governors of the Church, provided a spell of quiet which was to continue to the end of the century. This brief period, well employed by the Church, served as a veritable seed-time for the faith. Now the Great Sower had

## *Saint Anthony and the Third Century*

given Anthony good seed to plant in those silent years, which he did by prayer, fasting and meditation. After two decades of utter solitude he emerged to confront the multitudes, and found them practicing prayer and self-denial in imitation of an unseen ascetic. Anthony showed no elation but greeted them and urged them to lay up stores in heaven despite the world's contempt. They implored the holy man to be their guide in the spiritual life and thus began the colony of ascetics in the African desert. Behold! the seed sown in tears began to swell and shoot forth. It was like the dawn of Eden, and the prophecy of Isaias come to pass:

There will be joy in the wilderness and the desert. . . .  
Like the narcissus, will it burst into bloom  
And exult, how greatly! and resound with triumph  
Those will see the glory of the Lord.  
The splendor of the Lord.<sup>4</sup>

Time brought more and more visitors to the remote mountain, strangers from everywhere, who came to lay bare their souls and make their peace with God. For one and all Anthony had deepest sympathy; he comforted those who were in sorrow, reconciled enemies, exhorting them to be patient and abide by the will of God. Not only did he cure the afflicted; more than once with the sign of the cross he liberated the possessed from the power of the devil! "Why wonder ye at this?" he exclaimed. "It is not we who do it, but Christ by means of those who believed in Him." When word of such wonders reached the outside world, pagan philosophers, curious and doubting, made their way to the famed desert abode. Imagine their surprise at seeing such a multitude dwelling together in love and service, assembled as if for a prayer or hymn of praise. Many of these intellectuals, regarding Anthony as a "respectable old party,"

<sup>4</sup> Is. XXV, 1-2

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

jeered at the hermit's ignorance of Latin and Greek literature and in their arrogant way sought to entrap him, but argue as they might, the gracious hermit who knew no Greek and spoke only Coptic easily discomfited them. On the other hand, honest seekers of the truth found him to be man without guile, with the wisdom of a seer and the vision of a seraph. "Do you believe too," Anthony counseled them, "and ye shall see that our religion lies not in some science of argument but in faith, which operates through the words of Jesus Christ; which if ye attain ye too would no longer seek for demonstrations drawn from arguments, but ye would account faith in Christ all-sufficient."

### *Heroes of Christ*

Who then was this singularly blessed man? What sort of appearance did the aging ascetic present? Well, Anthony, always God's gentleman, had grown marvellously in wisdom and holiness. A spiritual portrait of him shows the Egyptian saint instinct with God and speaks eloquently of his inner life and virtues. "He was," writes his friend Athanasius, "the same as they had known him before his retreat, having neither a full habit, as being with exercise, nor the shrivelled character which betokens fasts and conflicts with the evil ones. His mind was also serene, neither narrowed by sadness, nor relaxed by indulgence, neither overmerry nor melancholy. The Lord gave him grace in speech . . . and while he conversed with the people and exhorted them to remember the bliss to come and God's loving kindness to us in not sparing His Own Son but giving Him up for us all, he persuaded many to choose the monastic life." Now the marvel is that Anthony's work for souls went on year after year for a full century. So profoundly did his contemporaries react to his word and example that multitudes abandoned their town and

## *Saint Anthony and the Third Century*

city life, even their fields and estates and hastened to join the saint. Very soon they became monks enrolled in the hermit ranks and sought lives of self-mortification in order to merit heavenly citizenship. As if by some miracle of Heaven, monastery after monastery appeared in desert wastes. And the dwellers therein, having left all for the sake of Christ, found great joy in silent service of God and experienced an inward peace surpassing all understanding.

Little could Anthony have dreamed, even a quarter century earlier, of the destiny God had in store for his faithful followers. Lo! a spectacle of heavenly progress appears in the darkest hours of the African Church. Monasticism silently takes root in Egypt; men of stern mould embrace a life of slow martyrdom just to be like Christ and, in imitation of their Lord, expiate the sins of others. No mediocre souls, these, nor plaster of paris images, but very loving and lovable humans, holy, humble and heroic. On the upper Nile a disciple of Anthony, Pacomius, is forming such men into a society and drafting the first monastic rule. Learning about that rule and the calibre of the men who follow it, fresh multitudes of high-born youth quit the busy marts; ask only to be admitted into African monasteries to engage in prayerful activity and self-discipline. Their desert homes, amid the tombs, sands and thorn-bushes become the nurseries of spiritual service, the seed-beds for growth in the love of Christ. Yes, these monks are the ones who, with the great bishops and martyrs, plant the faith deeper and deeper in the parched soil, whose work will ultimately undo the powers of evil. They were, beyond all doubt, a veritable bulwark, a support and defense for the Church of God. Their lives resemble passion-flowers flourishing in the desert sands, their virtues incite hundreds to follow the way of the counsels and engage themselves in Christian service everywhere. North

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

Africa, in fact, has become the Garden of the Church! A secluded garden, perhaps, but one dotted with hermitages which exhaled a heavenly fragrance.

### *The Enemy in the House*

During many of these fifty epoch-making years, 250-300, "the Kings of the earth stood up and the princes met together, against the Lord and against His Christ." If the persecutions of the first and second centuries seemed severe, at least they were only spasmodic, but now they became infernally systematic. Decius (249-251), behaving like a devil, embarked on a cunningly conceived plan to destroy the Church; he put many Christians to death in all parts of the Empire even in far-off Britain. In vain did his equally ruthless successor, Gallus, order the faithful to sacrifice to the pagan gods, holding them responsible for the drought, famine and pestilence that swept over the Empire. Valerian (253-260), aware of these earlier failures, employed the shrewd method of attacking Christianity as a society, only to have his decrees nullified by his son, Gallienus, 260-268, who brought back the bishops from exile and granted the Christians toleration. While the tyranny of Emperors could not succeed in shaking the Church, the treachery of her own people deeply grieved her motherly heart. Her Divine Founder had said, "The enemies of a man are those of his own household," a prophecy which has often come to pass in her history. Again and again the Church has been injured and thwarted in her divine task by the reprobates in her own communion. Need we be surprised, then, at the crises in the third century when her unity was compromised by foes within, just as her very existence was threatened by paganism without? No, we need not, for we know that by the indwelling spirit of Christ she proved rock-like, indestructible. Ever faithful to divine

### *Saint Anthony and the Third Century*

teaching, she maintained her principles and excluded from the fold even those erratic zealots who professed to be followers of Christ.

In Africa, where the drama was its very own, you can see the Church sorely tried by heresy and schism. The peril to the faith had increased as Christianity embraced not only the poor and the ignorant but every level of society. Early in the century the rapid development of Christian learning at Alexandria had won over the educated classes, among whom, alas, were many pitiful climbers and proud time-servers. These did not have to suffer like their ancestors in the faith nor did the current happy relationship between Church and state increase their zeal a whit. Half-hearted Catholics, they lacked courage to take risks for their religion, rather did they prefer to follow the paths of dalliance and walk with heretical teachers. When the penal order went forth that all suspects be rounded up and offer public sacrifice or else — there were many downright cowards who gave up their Christian religion to save their skins. "The certificates of sacrifice," presented to such apostates appear among recently discovered Egyptian papyri.<sup>5</sup> Anthony himself was to feel the impact of these foes, for he lived far into the next century, dying at the age of one hundred and fifty years.

Let us now take a last over-the-shoulder glance in order to clarify our view of the third century. The scene of passing events is both spacious and dramatic. Bitter persecution has come and gone, gone and come again, yet the Church stands out strong and vigorous. Great teachers and scholars crowd the stage; greater still are the martyrs who give their lives for Christ. You see the Church a divine society, Catholic, cosmopolitan, above provincial and imperial systems. Yet she remains the humble follower of Jesus, actively en-

<sup>5</sup> Oxyrhynchus Papyri, vol. IX, p. 49

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

gaged in her divine adventure; aloof from the world, she renders to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but always professes an infinitely higher allegiance which belongs to God alone. More than ever she is conscious of the sheep and the goats in her pasture and is certain of those who belong to her ranks and of those who are outside the true fold. As Catholic unity grows apace, Christian discipline thrives, and well-organized dioceses group themselves around metropolitan sees. Carthage has become the center for Africa, Numidia and Mauretania; Alexandria for Egypt and Cyrenaica; and all look to Rome where the Pope rules in the name of Christ. In far-off places the gospel seed, long buried in the dark earth, is rapidly springing up, forth-flowering beyond the monastery gardens, casting fresh seeds on every side. Houses of divine worship can be found everywhere, erected by the Christians who display a magnificent *esprit de corps*. And as churches, like the ascetic abodes in the Thebaid, multiply amazingly, these power-houses of the Kingdom dispense living Christ-given energy throughout the Roman world. But the war against evil is still far from being won. The major task, under God, remains for the Popes and the monks. Yet the miracle of monasticism, the spiritual prowess of heroes of the faith will challenge all the forces of paganism and eventually ensure a braver and better world.

# Saint Jerome

## GOD'S BATTLER

# SAINT JEROME AND THE FOURTH CENTURY

<i>Roman Emperors</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
<p> DIOCLETIAN, 284-305 </p> <p> CONSTANTIUS, 308 </p> <p> SEVERUS, 310 </p> <p> GALERIUS, 311 </p> <p> CONSTANTINE, 313 </p> <p> MAXENTIUS, 314 </p> <p> MAXIMIN, 314 </p> <p> LICINIUS, 314 </p>	<p> Persecution by Diocletian 300  Anthony organizes the monks 305  Ephrem the Syrian born at Nisibis 306  Constantine hailed as Caesar by his legions 307 </p> <p> Battle of Milvian Bridge 310 </p> <p> Edict of Milan 313 </p> <p> Age of Schism 315  Persecution by Licinius 321  Arianism spreads rapidly 325  Council of Nicea 325  Pacomius writes the monastic rule 328  Athanasius banished to Gaul 335 </p> <p> Baptism of Constantine 337  Death of Paul, first hermit 343  Jerome born in Stridon, Italy 347  Anthony preaches against the Arians 350  Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers 354  Birth of Augustine in Africa 354  Basil founds monasticism 355  Jerome at school in Rome 359 </p> <p> Pagan revival under Julian 363 </p> <p> Baptism of Jerome 366  Jerome travels to Gaul 368  Home again, then to Aquileia 370  Ambrose, Bishop of Milan 374  Jerome enters Syrian desert 375  Gregory of Nyssa exiled by Arians 377  Jerome meets Gregory of Nazianzus 377 </p> <p> Damasus makes Jerome his secretary 380  Edict De Fide Catholica 380  Council of Constantinople 381  Trials of Jerome in Rome 385  Jerome in Bethlehem 386  Development of Monasticism 386 </p> <p> Gregory of Nyssa dies 394 </p> <p> Augustine, Bishop of Hippo 395 </p> <p> The Empire now officially Catholic 399 </p>	<p> ST. MARCELLINUS, 296-304 </p> <p> ST. MARCELLUS I, 308-309  ST. EUSEBIUS, 309-310  ST. MELCHIADES, 311-314 </p> <p> ST. SYLVESTER, 314-335 </p> <p> ST. MARK, 336-337  ST. JULIUS I, 337-352 </p> <p> ST. LIBERIUS, 352-366 </p> <p> ST. DAMASUS, 366-384 </p> <p> ST. SIRICIUS, 384-398 </p> <p> ST. ANASTASIUS I, 398-401 </p>

## SAINT JEROME AND THE FOURTH CENTURY

### *The Battle Joined*

The fourth century witnessed the supreme trial of the Church of Christ. Persecution raised its ugly head like a giant cobra, while treacherous foes could be found within the gates. All in all, the world, the flesh and the devil sought the destruction of God's kingdom. But the Church came through victorious by the efforts of great saints, fully a dozen standing out like the chosen Twelve in Apostolic times. Clad in the armor of God, they wore the breastplate of justice and wielded the sword of the Spirit. Not one of them, it is true, had to shed his blood, yet all underwent spiritual martyrdom; the price they paid was tears and toil, exile and endless sacrifice. What a pageant these commanders of Christ present leading their armies through the century! Desert legions waging a hidden warfare directed by Anthony, Pacomius, and Ephrem the Syrian. Troops in the field under the three great Fathers of the East, Basil, Gregory Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa. Iron squadrons following the western leaders, Jerome, Ambrose and Augustine. Add to these great names Athanasius who waged a fifty-year war against the Arians; Hilary of Poitiers serving on the battle front in Gaul; and Pope Damascus who issued orders while the conflict raged around the Rock of Peter. The contribution of each of them must be seen as part of a much larger picture. Without their magnificent achievement, however, the tide of the holy war might have been in the other direction. As it turned out, when the smoke of battle cleared, the Church fortified in the most threatened quarters had quite mastered the Empire even to the frontiers of its vast borders.

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

If history teaches anything it shows us God at work in His world. His political providence is as evident in the drama of this century as His never-failing spiritual guidance of the indestructible Church. What, for instance, could be more divinely dramatic than the sudden change of Roman heart, the abrupt shift of imperial policy towards Christianity. The contemporary historian, Eusebius, relates how during the first decade of the century calumny and persecution hounded the faithful. In a demonic burst of bestiality, Diocletian and his nephew, Maximim, gave the Christians "fire and sword, piercing with nails, wild beasts, deep pools, burnings, cutting off of limbs, perforations, boring of eyes, mutilation of the whole body; add to these, starvation, the mines, chains."<sup>1</sup> Thus did ruler and rabble unite in cold-blooded mass-murder to exterminate the children of the Church. And yet by the second decade, Diocletian's spate of blood was wellnigh spent. Even more, the Emperor destined to succeed the tyrant, viewing with disgust the horrible waste of human life, was glad when that persecution failed. Constantius Chlorus, utterly unlike his blood-thirsty predecessors, appears to have been a happy man who worshipped only one God, but it was his soldier son whom Heaven chose to do away once and for all with the old savage methods. Like his humanitarian father, Constantine the Great recognized that Christians already formed a large minority of Roman citizens; they were too honorable to be baited like wild dogs; and ominously enough — was it Nemesis or divine justice — every one of their royal baiters had come to an evil end.

### *Dawn and Dark*

The rapid change for the better began in 307 when Constantine's legions in far-off Britain hailed him Augustus. In

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *History*, book VIII, chap. 14

### *Saint Jerome and the Fourth Century*

soldier fashion they then proceeded straightway to make good their claim by force of arms. A miracle of heaven followed on the field of strife — "About the middle of the day, as the sun was turning to the west, Constantine saw with his own eyes a figure of the Cross made up of light, and with it the inscription, 'In this, conquer.'"<sup>2</sup> After the Battle of Milvian Bridge the victorious leader, resolved to embrace the Christian religion, became a catechumen. Though Constantine only received baptism on his deathbed, all the laws and institutions of his career show him to be a whole-hearted Christian. The famous edict of Milan issued in 313 gave immunity to the clergy besides freeing the Church from her pagan foes. Next the Emperor bore down hard on the heretics, harder still on the pagans, urging all to join the Catholic Church. No heathen temple was permitted to be erected during his reign; whereas churches, basilicas, institutions were built and endowed by this incredible man who planned his own burial place among the tombs of the apostles. The sons of Constantine, Constans (350) and Constantius (361) carried on their father's policy of uprooting paganism — *cesset superstitio: sacrificiorum aboleatur insania*. Yet while Constans proved loyal to Pope Julius, his weaker brother favored the Arians in the bitter strife within the Church.

With the accession of Christian Emperors the Church enjoyed more freedom of action. None the less, here was a century-long task of restoring justice as well as orthodoxy. "Holy Church," said one of her greatest Popes, "corrects some things with indignation, others she tolerates out of pity, while in yet other cases she averts her gaze and bears with the abuse for motives of prudence." The things she can never permit, however, are heresy and schism, the rending of the seamless garment of Our Savior. So in this fourth century, false

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, *History*, chap. 28

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

teachers had to be exposed, the worst enemies of the Church being as usual those of her own household. By 311 the Donatist Schism became widespread, but deadliest of all were the errors disseminated in 317 by Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria. This clever dialectician, excommunicated when still a deacon, attacked the doctrine of the Trinity and denied the divinity of Christ, declaring that the Son is not equal to the Father nor did He exist from eternity. Had his heresy succeeded, the Name of Jesus would have been degraded, reverence for Him lessened, and His divine teachings reduced to mere myth. Arius won the support of Constantia, sister of Constantine, whereupon the vindictive anarchy proceeded to travesty the teaching of the Church making his appeals to the mob. Like wasps of Satan, his followers swarmed over the Empire; they resorted to every trick, every ruse, even fire and sword, to tear out the very tap-roots of the true Faith. At length Pope Sylvester and three hundred and eighteen Catholic bishops condemned Arius and his adherents at the Council of Nice, in Bithynia; the aged hermit Anthony left his solitude to combat them in Egypt, while great doctors of the West and East exposed their subversive teachings through the century. But it was Athanasius, "the Father of Orthodoxy," who stood longest in the line of fire as the conflict spread. The holy bishop of Alexandria had seen through Arius from the first and refused to restore him to communion despite the threats of the Emperor. Sad to say, the synods of Arles (353) and Milan (355) under royal pressure actually condemned the indomitable prelate. Six times he suffered banishment; seventeen years were spent in exile, yet for half-a-century this champion of the faith waged war against the Church's bitterest foes. Athanasius died in 373 and Arianism meantime wormed its way into the barbaric tribes of Germany. Cut up into many

## *Saint Jerome and the Fourth Century*

factions, the heresy continued to plague the Church until 744, when it eventually disappeared from sight on the plains of Lombardy.

### *Early Years of Jerome*

Nearly midway in the century, in the year 347, Jerome was born in Stridon, Italy. The parents of this great battler for God appear to have been nominal Christians of the worldly sort, time-serving and ambitious. Next their heart lay the success of their five children — these must make good in the turbulent Roman world. And what a world! Already, in Jerome's infancy and childhood the Arian Goths lay in wait behind the Julian Alps, ready to swoop down on the Italian peninsula. In 378 they spread in wild waves over Stridon which eventually disappeared from the face of the earth so that today not even the site of the town can be identified. "Witness," Jerome wrote, "witness the soil of my birthplace; apart from the sky and earth, the bushes springing again, and the thickets, all has perished." It must have pained the heart of the old scholar when he looked back to the tender years when he went to school there, played "hide and seek" in the cells of the slaves, and shared youth's joys and sorrows with Bonosus, his inseparable friend and classmate. Life in Stridon had been good to this pair, hope bright, and dark hours far away. But the day came in 359 when the comrades quit their natal town to continue their studies in the city of the Caesars. Both, aged twelve, full of energy and joy of life, had cemented a lasting friendship, nor did they part company until, fifteen years later, each went his hermit way to different solitudes. As we glimpse them now the striplings are bound for the capital looking forward to eight exciting years to be spent in the freshness of their youth.

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

Arrived in Rome, they very likely found lodgings with friends or at the home of a schoolmaster. That from the first they had ardent desire to study there can be little doubt, for both lads were endowed with endless curiosity and love of learning. The celebrated grammarian, Donatus, taught them Greek and Latin classics, Virgil in especial; and often Jerome could be found busily copying manuscripts, intent on building up a library. Books he always held in high value, and these laboriously transcribed treasures were to prove his *vade mecum* in years to come when he would travel a good part of the Roman world — Gaul, Asia Minor, Palestine. Did the 'teener in school ever dream of such an odyssey? Who knows? What we do know is that Jerome completed the Roman course in secondary school in 363 and was ready for the rhetoricians. In the meantime the sixteen-year-old lad had his eyes opened to many things not at all good. For among his companions were boys of questionable character attracted to the big city by love of pleasure rather than scholarship. Infirm of purpose they proved an easy prey to impulse which led them into sin, sloth, and many consequent difficulties. Even in the classroom rowdyism often prevailed when care-free grown-ups, known as *Eversores* — that is, smashers — took it into their empty heads to wreck the place. They would crash the lectures, rib the masters and, what was exceedingly dangerous, dodge their school fees. Since scant restraint was placed on them after school hours, boys of that sort frequented vile pagan shows or noisily muscled their way into the amphitheatre. Too often these public cut-ups, cornered by the local police, were handed their passports and sent home, for trouble-makers might not tarry in the capital. It was unfortunate that Jerome, witty, vivid of speech, got to rubbing elbows with such like; very soon he joined them to prove he could be a boon companion in the

### *Saint Jerome and the Fourth Century*

wild life of Rome. The hand of God, however, reached out to save him, so the predestined youth escaped the toils of evil, but only by the skin of his teeth. At the age of nineteen, having experienced a change of heart, he asked to be baptized and was privileged to receive the Sacrament from Pope Liberius. A while later Jerome and Bonosus turned their backs on the sin-laden city, the Roman school law requiring all out-of-town students to depart at the age of twenty.

#### *Hike to Gaul*

Three great climaxes marked the drama of Jerome's career from this time on. The first took place in Gaul whither the pilgrim students now directed their steps. A look at the map is enough to show the enormous distances they braved in attempting such a journey. Many a bright idea they must have exchanged on the way; many, too, the surprises as they came in contact with strange tides of life. Make no mistake, these days were full of hazards for two young travellers just at the age when curiosity is most active, and danger a very challenge. Grim reality stared them in the face as they slogged along side by side, until they finally arrived in Treves, the court city of the Gallic area. The Empire, divided by Diocletian, you will remember, embraced the praefectures of Gaul, including Britain and Spain; of Italy, embracing South Germany and North Africa; the praefecture of the Danubian Provinces; and that of the East — Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt and the Balkan peninsula. One time or another in his travels Jerome would set foot in every praefecture, but now he sought wisdom, pursued knowledge in Gaul. Out here in the west the authority of the Pope was anything but powerful, Arianism having made frightful ravages in the district. What with the devastating effects of this deadly heresy, the times were such as to try the souls

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

of all good Catholics at home or abroad. Only a few years earlier, the great Bishop, Hilary of Poitiers, born of a pagan Gallo-Roman family, had gone to his reward after a lifetime of heroic effort in warding off the heretics. And if ever a man fought the good fight, withstanding to their faces both prince and Emperor, it was this same Hilary. In Gaul he had worked incessantly for the maintenance of the Nicene Creed; indeed the Latin Church owed to him its victory over Arianism. News of this "Athanasius of the West" our travellers doubtless heard — the great battle Hilary had put up, his exile from Asia Minor, then from the East, then from Milan, and all at the hands of the Arian hater. One wonders how deeply Jerome and Bonosus were impressed by the vivid accounts of such undying heroism. Or how they felt when along with the sight of much human suffering they also witnessed the tremendous enthusiasm and boundless devotion of persecuted Catholics.

War scarred the earth those Gallic days just as heresy scarred men's souls. Intertribal strife was so common that the Roman students doubtless encountered more than one eerie experience on the road. In later years Jerome writes about meeting cannibals, an original tribe of Brittany; tells how he picked up a few words from a Celtic tribe with the same language and culture he found among the Galatians in far-off Asia Minor. Not only were the hikers lucky in learning many folkways and much curious folklore, they did better by devotion to serious study. Wide-eyed, Jerome acquired a store of wisdom by stopping here and there to copy time-worn manuscripts, thus adding to his priceless collection. Even greater discoveries awaited the comrades as they went along, spiritual "finds" which would profit them more than gold or silver. Echoes of another great exile lingered in Gaul — Athanasius. The illustrious "Father of the West"

## *Saint Jerome and the Fourth Century*

was well known in these parts, having taught the Gallic Church unforgettable lessons about Anthony of Egypt, and the amazing austerities of the monks in the Thebaid. To wandering students these reports must have seemed marvelous, well nigh incredible, until one day they actually came across skin-and-bone hermits living in huts remote from human society. No doubt of it, experience is a great teacher, and they had many experiences in and out of Treves, then a center of Christian ascetism. Deep, indelible marks had been made on these young men; in fact so great was the power of word and work, so strong the urge to lead a holy life that Jerome secretly vowed himself to Christ. He firmly resolved to enter the hermit ranks, nor was it long before he won Bonosus over to the same ideal. As you see them about to leave the west, the plan of hermit life is already fast-laid in their minds. Gaul can hold these young men no longer, for they are determined to attempt a great spiritual adventure.

### *Desert Bound*

On their eastern journey, Jerome planned a stopover at Stridon to say a last good-by. Back home, however, he met with a cool reception from frankly disappointed parents. Ten years in Rome, two more in the West, and this worn and travel-stained son of theirs returns — empty-handed! No job in the capital, not even a promise of court employment in Gaul. Nothing to show for all the money spent! When Jerome told them of his long-cherished plan to enter the hermit life, it was the last straw. God's tramp in a paradisaal cave! The very idea was crazy, the attempt insane! After their stubborn son had made a very brief stay, he betook himself to the near-by town of Aquileia. As a matter of fact the realization of his hermit dreams lay years ahead; it would be far from easy to escape the bonds of habit or fly

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the trap of circumstances. He tarried three years in Aquileia, which served as a real step forward, since he was able to practice ascetism there with a company of kindred spirits — Bonosus, of course, Rufinus, Heliadorus, Paul of Concordia, Innocentius and Evagrius. All six, it is worth noting, became monks later on, arriving by different routes in Egypt, Palestine or Syria. The plan Jerome nursed in his eager heart was to visit Syria first, then Antioch, and end his journey in Jerusalem. There was much shilly-shallying again before the wavering pilgrim could make up his mind, but in 373 he bestirred himself and bravely set out for that distant goal. Let no one suppose that Jerome entered upon a gay or easy adventure. No modern explorer, you may be sure, ever had harder going than this desert-bound scholar. Many a day as he drove himself mercilessly, book-pack on back, there was no relief in sight, no respite from risk. Yet for weeks he plowed along because the cave in the sands held out the gift, the chance he so desired. The big thing was to reach a hermitage but the road proved difficult almost beyond belief; not only did he know hunger, thirst and deadly fatigue, he saw worse things in the eyes of evil doers who lived in the midst of pagan night. "At last," he writes, "having led a wandering life in the uncertainty of my journeyings, after having travelled through Thrace, Pontus, and Bithynia, the whole of Galatia, Cappadocia and Cilicia, my body was broken by the burning heat, at last I reached Syria which to me was like a peaceful harbour opened to the ship-wrecked sailor."<sup>3</sup>

The second climax in Jerome's life occurred in Antioch, his last stepping-stone to the desert. Upon reaching this ancient center he was obliged to stay long enough to regain his lost energy. "Always ill," he wrote, "I have been stricken

<sup>3</sup> Epist. 3, 3

### *Saint Jerome and the Fourth Century*

by all possible maladies. My continual sufferings so consumed me that death lay in wait for me and I almost lost consciousness of myself."<sup>4</sup> None the less the semi-invalid managed to attend the lectures of Apollinaris, a famous master, and add precious manuscript to his growing library; more important still he wrote a book — "The Miracle of Vercelli." Was the avid Jerome at large in the pagan classics becoming content with mere scholarship? Or was he inwardly confused by his stay in an atmosphere of ease amid the pleasures of congenial companionship? One can get out of spiritual condition so much more quickly than one can get back into spiritual condition. And Jerome's problem — how to keep his soul fit — was vastly important in that hard, rough, godless world. Eager as ever for things present, he may have grown somewhat indifferent to his early ideal. It was then God took him by the hand and led him to the road he really wanted to follow. In that Arian-ridden center the lagging pilgrim experienced another spiritual crisis which steeled his will to struggle onward. One day in his twenty-seventh year Jerome fell into a faint; his friends, believing the ailing man had passed out of life, began to make ready for his burial. "Suddenly," he relates, "I was rapt in spirit and brought before the tribunal of the Great Judge. There was so much light, such a radiance of glory in those who stood about Him, that I fell upon my face not daring to raise my eyes. . . . Then said the Judge, 'Thou liest. Thou art a Ciceronian, not a Christian. Where thy treasure is there is thy heart!' Immediately I fell silent. . . . 'Lord, if ever I touch profane books, if I read them, I shall have decried Thee': Upon this oath I was released and I came once more to the earth. . . . And all that was no mere illusion of sleep, one of those vain dreams which often deceive us. Witness

<sup>4</sup> Epist. 3, 3

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the judgment seat before which I lay: witness the sentence at which I trembled. God grant that I never be subjected to such torments! My shoulders were all bruised, I could still feel the blows after my awakening."<sup>5</sup> The time of temporizing was over, the "Ciceronian" at long last had become alert to the old call, aware more than ever of the danger that lay in further delay.

### *Life in a Cave*

Vibrant with great resolves, Jerome struck out for the desert, never resting until he reached his hermit goal. There were at the time many monks dwelling in Syria; they formed the vanguard of the great army of God that overflowed Egypt, fanned out across the Red Sea to the Sinai peninsula and thence to the north. The fame of Ephrem, "Prophet of Syria," shone brightly and his writings inspired those monks among whom Jerome cast his lot. Ephrem, son of a pagan priest, had found the faith in which he was instructed by St. James of Nisibis; after that he lived eight years with the Egyptian ascetics and received Baptism at the hands of St. Basil. "The Harp of the Holy Ghost," as Syrians call him, wrote some 300,000 verses; he was also an orator, exegete, and teacher whose fearless engagement with the Eastern heretics merited for him the title, Father of the Church. Now Ephrem's ascetic genius no less than his country held great appeal for the world-weary newcomer. "Near to Syria, then, among the lands of the Saracen," the pilgrim sought for an abode large enough to shelter himself and his library. Nor was it long before he found a suitable limestone cave; and he quietly settled down to a life of prayer, meditation and penance. Here in this remote corner, hermits could feel certain of protection from barbarian raiders. Here also,

<sup>5</sup> Epist. 22, 30

### *Saint Jerome and the Fourth Century*

not far from Chalcis on the caravan route to the Euphrates, they received the service of priests and messages from far-away friends.

Luckily the hermit in the making has left us a clear, vivid picture of his two-and-a-half years' stay in the Syrian desert. "From the caverns of our cells," Jerome wrote, "we condemn the world. . . . I have robbed no one. I am no idler in receipt of charity. By our arms, in the sweat of our brow, we gain our food each day."<sup>6</sup> "Thanks to the Lord we have here in abundance manuscripts of the sacred books."<sup>7</sup> Always avid for the knowledge that saves, Jerome studied Hebrew at the feet of a rabbi near by: "What labor this cost me I alone know and those who were my companions." There were days full of light when the ardent novice hymns for sheer joy: "O desert new-springing with the flowers of Christ! O place of hermits rejoicing in the close friendship of God! The light I look upon, believe me, is strangely brighter. Here it is my joy to shake off the burden of flesh and fly up to the pure radiance of heaven."<sup>8</sup> But the life of an ascetic with its glimpses of timeless beauty, has its dark side also, days full of inner trial. "Even to the desert," Jerome declared, "the enemy has obstinately pursued me, so that now in solitude, I have to suffer wars still more terrible. Oh, how often in that desert solitude, burnt dry by the heat of the sun, a forbidding habitation for monks, I fancied I was back again amidst the delights of Rome. . . . My rebellious flesh I tried to conquer by weeks of fastings. Enraged with myself, I rushed along deep into the desert. . . . I, the companion of scorpions and wild beasts . . . weary to death." By this time Jerome had become acutely aware of another

<sup>6</sup> Epist. 17, 2

<sup>7</sup> Epist. 5, 2

<sup>8</sup> Epist. 14, 10

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

misery which took the very heart out of the young ascetic. He discovered many troublesome monks prone to quarrelling, bickering and religious strife. "On one side," he cried, "rages the frenzy of the Arians, supported by the powers of the world. On the other are the three factions of a Church cloven by schism, which seek to draw me to themselves. And against me is ranged the ancient authority of the monks of the neighborhood." <sup>9</sup>

### *Heart Speaks to Heart*

Caves in the desert no longer held their aura for Jerome. The hermit of three years, weary of strife with his fellow-monks, decided it was time to leave. In 377, he packed up his library and made off for Antioch, intent on pursuing some other path heavenwards. A few years later, having been ordained to the priesthood by Paulinus, he followed the impulse of his heart and took his way towards Constantinople. Long had Jerome hoped that some day he might visit Gregory Nazianzen, whom the Catholics of Constantinople had demanded for their pastor after the death of Basil, founder of Eastern Monasticism. True enough their new bishop, gentle and peace-loving, lacked the heroic spirit of Basil, yet he was an illustrious theologian as well as a literary genius of the highest order. One can imagine the meeting of the restless Jerome and the retiring Gregory; as scholars and brother ascetics they must have had much in common, besides many worthwhile experiences to relate. Few men of that day could more clearly visualize the dark doings of the Arians; and no two were better able to tell from bitter experience what the faithful had suffered in the East and the West. "When I frequented the schools of Grammar," Jerome declares, "Rome was reeking with the blood of idolatrous sacrifices, and the

<sup>9</sup> Epist. 15, 2; 16, 2; 17, 2-3; 22, 7; 16, 2

## *Saint Jerome and the Fourth Century*

death of Julian the Apostate was announced at the height of the sacrifice." In turn, the bishop enlightened his guest about the Apostate Emperor's attempt (*blanda persecutio*, Jerome called it) to restore the pagan priesthood; it was the same gentle Gregory who courageously branded the whole thing "a senseless mimicry of Christianity," much as Athanasius scorned the tyrant's bitter persecution as "a little cloud which would soon pass."

Naturally they fell to discussing the heroic deeds of unnamed Christian boys and girls, the simple moral greatness of old unlettered people, the courage and self-sacrifice of priests and monks under torture for their faith. Nor did the reminiscient bishop fail to enthrall his eager visitor with many school-day stories about his friend Basil, who had only recently gone to his reward. The Great Bishop of Caesarea had been to Gregory all that Jerome was to Bonosus; in fact the schoolmates had dwelt together as hermits near the Black Sea. Yet never were two holy men more unlike, for Basil was a born battler and Gregory a lover of peace. You can almost hear Gregory describing his friend, as a man not only ready to fight to the last ditch, but a great orator and commentator on the Bible as well, the very type of saint that would appeal to Jerome. And when they talked of the stout defenders of the faith, a never tiresome topic, the bishop could tell with a twinkle in his eye how his compatriot fearlessly withstood the Vicar of Pontus to his face. Here is the story:

When Basil had presented himself the magistrate gave orders to pull off his outer garment. His inner garment which remained, did not conceal his emaciated body. The brutal persecutor threatened to tear out his liver. Basil smiled and answered, "Thanks for your intention: where it is at present, it has been no slight annoyance." However, the Vicar got the worst of it. The City rose, the people swarmed about the court as bees smoked out of

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

their home. The armourers, for whom the place was famous, the weavers, nay the women, with any weapon which came to hand, with clubs, stones, firebrands, spindles, besieged the Vicar, who was only saved from immediate death by the interposition of his prisoner.<sup>10</sup>

News like that, so vivid and vital, no less than the personal holiness of Gregory inspired Jerome in years to come; more valuable still was the solid learning he acquired at the feet of the great theologian. The ready student during his visit succeeded in mastering the Greek tongue, drank deep of the founts of revelation, and became widely versed in Holy Writ.

### *Back to Rome*

With great reluctance the wandering Italian bade farewell to his host, the humble bishop and kindly gentleman. But part they must, for his mind had been fully made up to go to Rome where Damasus occupied the Chair of Peter. Need it be said that the great Pope cordially received his visitor, knowing Jerome to be not only a widely travelled observer but also a scholar deeply read in Latin literature and master of other useful languages. No one, certainly, could be more valuable in the Vatican, and Damasus presently made Jerome his secretary. At this time the imperial center was a hot-bed of heresy and strife, torn apart by corrupt politics, many of its parishes ill-shepherded by a time-serving priesthood. The papal secretary, nothing daunted, set to work with an eye to improving conditions by opening a library and founding a school of piety. Such a move, one may be sure, won little support from the worldly Catholics; no help at all from mammonites out for power. None the less Jerome carried on, taking over a palace on the Aventine where holy women, many of them noble ladies like Paula and

<sup>10</sup> Newman, *Historical Studies* vol. II, p. 13.

### *Saint Jerome and the Fourth Century*

her two daughters, studied the word of God and the rules of the higher life; also at the Pope's request he began a revision of the Book of Psalms, which was to serve the Church for eleven centuries. In the meantime, the vigorous reformer learned many things about local conditions and had to admit there was little change for the better since his own school days. Rome, still a half-pagan city, offered a wretched pattern of the Kingdom of God; its Christian children were only half instructed in their faith, their parents for the most part dwelt in error and dealt in falsehood. The more this zealous priest saw in his talks and walks the greater his sorrow, the deeper his indignation. And he lost no time in bringing the Romans to bar because of their sins and follies. Not since the days of Justin Martyr had Rome heard such devastating comment or read such scathing charges as came from this stranger within its walls. For the man once roused, was wont to dip his pen in acid.

It is to Jerome's eternal credit that he could make the force of his bitter blows felt by those who deserved them. In return they hit back, both clergy and laity, and shortly the Pope's secretary became "the most unpopular man in Rome." Damasus stood behind him, however, and God's battler was afforded powerful protection. But the good cause suffered a double loss when the Pope died in the year 384. Now that Jerome's great friend was gone, his enemies poured out the vials of their wrath, making it so hot for the reformer that he was obliged to quit the city. Swept into unmerited retirement, call it exile if you wish, Jerome was overwhelmed with grief and tears: "Yet I thank God," he could protest, "that I am counted worthy of the world's hatred. I was a fool wishing to sing the Lord's song in a strange land, and in leaving Mount Sinai to seek the help of Egypt. I forgot that the gospel warns us that he who goes down from Jerusalem,

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

immediately falls among robbers, is spoiled, is wounded, is left for dead. But although priest and Levite may disregard me, there is still the Good Samaritan . . . Who, 'when men said to Him, 'Thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil,' disclaimed having a devil, but did not disclaim being a Samaritan, this being the Hebrew equivalent for our word guardian. Men call me a mischief-maker, and I take the title as a recognition of my faith for I am but a servant . . . but I know I must enter the Kingdom of Heaven through evil report as well as through good.'"

### *Peace in Bethlehem*

Imagine the great man again in retreat. It was August of 385 when he left Rome forever. The desert again called and he yearned for a life of inner peace. At Antioch he met Paula and Eustochium eager to pray at the places made sacred by the feet of their Savior. They visited Egypt, Alexandria too, and the monastic city in the Nitrian hills. Arrived in Jerusalem, the wiry pilgrim makes use of his hands as well as mind and heart at one task after another. And what magnificent achievements resulted! In no time a monastery was built for men, another for women, near the manger in which Christ was born; next the tireless worker saw to the erection of pilgrim shelters along the imperial highway. An eye-witness, Suplicius Severus, speaks of Jerome ever immersed in his studies and his books, occupied day and night with reading or writing and taking scarcely any rest. All who knew him marvelled at the spiritual dynamism of the man whom they hailed the foremost scholar of Christendom. Was not this tribute richly deserved, since Jerome, single-handed, revised the old Italic versions of the New Testament, and at the request of the Holy See translated the Scriptures? Add to these monumental tasks his

### *Saint Jerome and the Fourth Century*

enormous correspondence — more than a hundred letters, brilliant but often violent, are still extant. Day after day messages reached his post from the most distant countries; visitors followed in time, coming from afar to consult the great authority. The Bishop of Hippo wrote him from Africa and the two discussed their difficulties, scriptural and theological. In fact, the Abbot of Bethlehem, found himself willy-nilly in the thick of problems, conferences, controversies, translations and what not. Heavy his tasks might be and were, but he was happy as never before, for the wandering fighter had at last found a haven of peace close to the Crib of Christ.

Before leaving the century let us attempt to clarify the closing scene. No student who has any acquaintance with history can fail to be impressed by the progress of the Church. Two hundred years earlier the brilliant but erratic Tertullian had remarked the impossibility of a Roman Emperor's becoming a Christian. Now all the Emperors were Christians and their domains in the process of conversion, Pope and ruler working hand in hand. None the less a double peril faced Church and Empire. The Arians, like evil birds of prey, hovered everywhere, darkening the sky and threatening the peace of the Church. Then there were the barbarian Goths, asking leave in 376 to cross the Danube and enter Roman territory. Great hopes, however, centered in Theodosius whose law of the Empire enjoined all his subjects to hold "the religion which the divine Apostle Peter delivered to the Romans and which is followed by the Pontiff Damasus . . ." In 391 the same Emperor closed the temples of the old gods; in 392 he prohibited pagan worship, and his successors sought to complete the work of coercion. The great Ascetics — Anthony, Pacomius and Ephrem — had long since gone to their reward. Gone too were the indomitable champions, Athanasius and Hilary, Basil and Gregory; Pope Damasus

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

had been succeeded by Siricius and Gregory of Nyssa, youngest of the Greek Fathers, still lived. Valiantly the great Triumvirate of Western Fathers carried on for the cause of Christ. See how they fought the good fight, kept the faith, ran their course. In his busy monastery the Abbot of Bethlehem, absorbed in many plans, found time to flay the clergy for their laxity and castigate skin-deep Christians. At Milan, Ambrose ruling his diocese with flaming justice, forced the Emperor himself to his knees in public penance for his brutal murder of the townsfolk of Thessalonica. In Africa, Augustine was deeply engaged in the Donatist and Arian controversies, proving beyond cavil that he was the greatest personality of them all, and one of the most prolific geniuses the world has ever known. Truly, then, can it be said that the Bark of Peter in this troubled century had met and weathered the most difficult tempests.

# Saint Patrick

## LIGHT OF THE NORTH

# SAINT PATRICK AND THE FIFTH CENTURY

<i>Roman Emperors</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
HONORIUS, 395-423	Scots raid the Empire to the Alps 400 Saxons from the Elbe scour North Sea 400 Patrick, the pilgrim, travels in Gaul 400  Death of Nial Righ of Ireland 405 Goths under Alaric sack Rome 410 Saracens devastate Egypt and Palestine 411 Patrick, the cleric, goes to Lerins 412 Patrick in Auxerre 415	ST. ANASTASIUS I, 398-401  ST. INNOCENT I, 401-417  ST. ZOZIMUS, 417-418 ST. BONIFACE I, 419-422
VALENTIAN III, 423-455	St. Augustine writing "The City of God" 420 Patrick instructed by St. Germanus 425 Spread of Nestorian heresy 428 Palladius sent to Ireland by Pope 430 Council of Ephesus 431 Patrick sets out to convert Ireland 431 Birthday at Tara of Christian Ireland 433 The Ard Righ and Patrick in Great Council 438 The Pope sends bishops to aid Patrick 439 Patrick preaches in Ulster 440 Catholic Faith of Patrick approved by Pope 441 See of Armagh is founded 444 Birth of St. Kieran, patron of Connaught 446 Churches founded in Connaught, Leinster, Munster Saxon conquest of England 449 Huns under Attila march on Rome 451 Birth of St. Brigid, patron of Leinster 451 Vandals, under Genseric sack Rome 455	ST. CELESTINE I, 422-432  ST. SIXTUS III, 432-440  ST. LEO THE GREAT, 440-461
MAXIMUS, 455 AVILUS, 457	Laeghine, son of Nial dies in Ireland 458 Monasticism spreads in Ireland 460	
MAJORIAN, 461 SEVERUS, 465		ST. HILARY, 461-468 ST. SIMPLICIUS, 468-483
AUTHEMIUS, 472 GLYCERIUS, 472 JULIUS NEPOS, 475 ROMULUS AUGUSTULUS, 476	Western Empire comes to an end 476 Odoacer the Goth, King of Italy 476 Basilicus supported by a corrupt Greek Church 477 Enda at Arranmore instructs Irish Saints 480 Birth of Brendan, foretold by Patrick 483	ST. FELIX III, 483-492
ZENO, 491 (Eastern) THEODORIC, 493	Patrick dies in Saul, March 17th 492 Theodoric is tolerant 493 St. Finian born in Ulster 495 Conversion of Clovis and the Franks 496 Birth of St. Kevin 498 Old Empire now Barbaric Kingdoms 499	ST. GELASIUS I, 492-496 ST. ANASTASIUS II, 496-498 ST. SYMMACHUS, 498-514

## SAINT PATRICK AND THE FIFTH CENTURY

### *The Dark Ages Begin*

The fifth century dawned, gray and threatening, for the Church and the Empire. Scots from Ireland waged war from the Grampians to the Alps, while Saxon war-hawks left the Rhine and the Elbe to scour the northern seas. Wave after wave of barbarians, Goths, Huns, Slavs, Teutons, swept from the banks of the Rhine to the Pyrenees, engulfing cities and their inhabitants. And as inroad followed inroad, there seemed nothing ahead but ruin for the old civilization. By the year 410 Rome itself was in the hands of the Goths; in 430 the Saracens were besieging Hippo, in North Africa; in 451 the Huns marched into north Italy, and doom hung over the Eternal City itself. All the horror of invasion, savagery, wanton destruction and intertribal strife continued through the century. Order, of course, was destroyed, law lost its power, letters slowly decayed, roads fell into ruin, religious dissension was followed by dry-rot of morals. What bitter storms beset the Church in this, the first of the five dark ages! Heretics fought Catholics so ruthlessly it looked as if Arianism might rapidly supplant Christianity. But the papacy stood firm like a lighthouse on the rocks of time, and bad as things were from every point of view, the Church actually renewed her strength. One reason was the toleration proclaimed by Theodoric the Goth in 493; another was the conversion of Clovis and his Franks in 496. After that, the Mother of the Nations, aided by the Sons of St. Patrick and the Sons of St. Benedict proceeded magnificently and patiently to convert the broken Empire, which had become a group of barbarian kingdoms.

A dozen years before the fevered century the dim figure of

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints.*

Patrick appears out beyond the orbit of the Empire. This free-born son of Calpurnius moves among the sheep and swine on Slemish mountain overlooking the vales of Antrim. In his youth Patrick had been dragged from his natal villa "Enon"—was it in Gaul, Wales, Caledonia or Roman Britain?—and brought to Ireland. Nial of the Nine Hostages, chief of the Kings, still dwelt in that dark but beautiful isle. And many a fierce marauder rose at his command, crossed the seas and ravaged the mainland. A court poet of the Emperor Honorius describes these war-bent Scots plying their oars:

— *totam cum Scotus Ibernam*  
*Movit, et infesto spumavit remige Tethys.*

In one of those bloody raids Patrick was seized and made captive. His parents slain in the siege, two of his sisters carried off in the fleet, the stalwart lad was sold as a slave and put to serve under a hard master. One wonders whether the young exile imagined that one day he would go away and come back to Ireland a conquering hero of Christ. "Was it the will of God," Patrick would write in later years, "or according to the flesh that I came to Ireland? I was bound in the Spirit that I should never again see any one of my relations. Do I not love tender mercy, when I thus act toward that nation which of old enslaved me?"<sup>1</sup>

### *A High-born Exile*

The Antrim chief, Milcho, made him a herdsman and as the rugged slave followed his flocks up hill and down dale he found plenty of time to think and pray. The gates to the past were closed it is true, yet that fact did not down him, for even then Patrick, pious from childhood up, was given to higher things. Of his inner life at that time the saint himself

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions*, C. IV, Par. 15

### *Saint Patrick and the Fifth Century*

has left a brief but vivid record: "On coming to Ireland," he says in his Confessions, "I was daily tending sheep, and many times in the day I prayed, and more and more the love of God, and His fear grew in me, and the spirit was strengthened, so that in a single day I have said as many as a hundred prayers, and in the night nearly as many; so that I remained in the woods and on the mountain; and before the dawn I was summoned to prayer by the snow, the ice, and the rain, and I did not suffer from them, nor was there any sloth in me, as I see now, because then the Spirit was burning within me." Notice the deep abiding spirit of prayer in this noble exile who walked with God all through the most trying years of his youth. There is no surprise that "the Lord deigned to grant him many favors and graces in the land of his captivity"; even so early the holy herdsman received intimations of the future in store for him. One night Milcho had a dream in which his gifted slave appeared, hair on fire, and drew so close that the burning hair almost suffocated the restless sleeper. Milcho pushed him aside, when suddenly in his dream the flame leaped upon the two daughters who lay asleep in the same bed, and the wind scattered their ashes over the land. Never was a master more startled than the Scots chief by this strange, terrifying experience. Asked the meaning of it all, Patrick frankly replied that the flame was the faith of the Holy Trinity which Milcho, sad to say, rejected but not so his daughters who would die the death of the just and become the glory of Ireland.

Six long years Patrick, clad in sheepskin, served his Antrim master well. And not unfruitfully either, for they were years when the youth, having known and loved God from the first, was nurtured by hidden graces; it was as easy for him to be true to Christ as for the Irish skies to be blue, or shamrocks green. By degrees the vigilant herdsman, brought in friendly

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

contact with the natives, began to dream of their conversion, and a holy hope was kindled that would never die. His heart went out to the lively, passionate people on this isle, who loved the unknown Creator in their own crude way. Yet that same great heart ached with pity when he beheld them observing black Druid rites and offering human sacrifices. The very thought of the lovable Irish, so warped in spirit, sickened him through and through. One day, he dared hope, all this would be changed, one day when God saw fit. In the year 393 Patrick made his escape to the west coast, and fled over the sea to Gaul. "After three days," he wrote, "we reached the land and for twenty-eight days we made our way through a desert. Food and drink failed us, and hunger pressed us sorely." Now that he had won through by the power of prayer, the freeman realized that he must spend years of study before he could return to Ireland as a missionary. But luckily for Patrick there was a monastery at Marmoutier on the banks of the Loire, ruled over by his kinsman St. Martin of Tours. Monks and missionaries from afar made it their resting place after the heat and burden of years spent in carrying the gospel to the barbarians. This abode of prayer and peace provided a veritable "heaven-haven" for the young pilgrim; its cells and caverns housed saints; its school offered the highest knowledge under the direction of seasoned instructors. "When then," asks Sulpicius Severus, "was there a church or city which did not aspire to possess priests from the Monastery of St. Martin?"

The newcomer, though not a member of the community, spent four years at Marmoutier under the guidance of St. Martin. One may be sure they were years which revived, enlarged and deepened the pilgrim's experience, years of study and prayer, rich in inspiration, teeming with the wisdom of "doctrine and learning." His teachers, perceiving Patrick's

## *Saint Patrick and the Fifth Century*

spiritual independence and originality, recognized him for what he was — a man sent of God. Had they any idea that their visitor was destined to be the most illustrious missionary of the Dark Ages? Did they dream that once Patrick left their holy retreat he would spend nearly two-score years in pilgrimage? Anyhow, he had much to learn during his stay, much to master about the ways and life of brave monks who had done yeoman service in the field afar. They could tell him about other days of derring-do in the Empire, and many facts about his kinsman, their beloved Abbot-Bishop, Martin, Apostle of Gaul. Born in Hungary in 315, the son of a pagan Roman tribune, he became a catechumen at ten, enrolled in the imperial cavalry and was baptized at twenty. Used to warfare, he now dedicated himself to lifelong service against the forces of evil; this soldier of Christ joined up with St. Hilary at Poitiers, proceeding shortly to combat the Arians in his homeland. And after many years of preaching the gospel and rooting out pagan superstitions, he was elected Bishop of Tours, where he continued to live as a simple monk, eventually founding the celebrated monastery of Marmoutier. The blessed days Patrick spend with St. Martin and his monks proved rich seed-time for the young refugee, but the hour struck when he should again follow the pilgrim path.

### *Hope Deferred*

After four blessed years in Marmoutier, Patrick having received tonsure, bade adieu to the monks and their holy places. But alas and alack! no sooner had he departed than he fell into the hands of pirates. Another experience of waiting and tension, of difficulties and privations, the sort that test the stoutest soul. The saint writes about this episode and the revelation that followed: "And again, after some years, I was once more taken captive, and on the first night I remained

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

with them. . . . On the sixtieth night the Lord delivered me from their hands. Again, after a few years I was with my relations in Brittany who received me as a son, and there in a vision of the night I saw a man named Vitricius, coming as it were from Ireland, with innumerable letters, one of which he gave to me, and in the first line I read, 'The voice of the Irish,' and as I repeated the first words of the letter I seemed at the same moment to hear. . . . 'We beseech thee, holy youth, to return and still walk among us.' " That clear call from above, one of many, must have greatly strengthened Patrick's desire to go back and convert Ireland, yet long years of trial lay ahead before he would reach the goal of holy endeavor. Gaul, in the days of his pilgrimage, appears free from barbarian inroads, guarded as it was by the Rhine and the Alps. So when the Huns were terrorizing the East, this pilgrim of God travelled from shrine to shrine, from monastery to monastery in preparation for his exalted mission. There were simply two things to be done — walk with God and obey His holy Will. "A husbandman, an exile, and unlearned," as he humbly describes himself, he carried on for three decades during which he grew in wisdom as in grace.

Think of it, thirty years! Years of hope that never faded, years of faith that never failed. Try to picture the endless stretch of travel, the encounters of peril and rebuff. He spent some time with the zealous and learned St. Vincent at Lerins, a stronghold of Christian piety and letters, garnering many spiritual treasures for his predestined apostolate. He hoped, of course, to go to Rome where Pope Innocent occupied the Chair of Peter but conditions proved anything but favorable. The Goths had invaded the Eternal City and the Church appeared to be in dire peril. Yet the fearless Innocent could say to barbarian and heretic alike — "Is it not known that the things which have been delivered to the Roman

## *Saint Patrick and the Fifth Century*

Church by Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, and preserved ever since, should be observed by all; and that nothing is to be introduced devoid of authority or borrowed elsewhere?" Patrick never saw Pope Innocent; he had no ecclesiastical credentials, so what could the poor wandering cleric do about it? But he did plow along as the years revolved, always resigned to the divine will; one might say his rule of the road read: "circumstances are God's sealed orders." Because Patrick had the faith of a true mystic, which can be summed up in one word, "Immediacy," he made use of the present moment, certain by grace that the Holy Spirit was guiding him.

One day during his travels from city to city Patrick arrived in Auxerre where Bishop Amator ordained him deacon. But it was Amator's successor, Germanus, who did so much for the wandering pilgrim. The two holy men got to know each other intimately and Patrick confided in the old bishop, telling him of the visions and "voices of children" summoning him to Ireland. The celebrated scholar and theologian was so impressed that he became Patrick's "philosopher, guide and friend," preparing him for ordination, giving him "the canons and all other ecclesiastical learning." More than that, Germanus, having been appointed papal legate, brought his cherished charge to Britain as a member of his train. This was in 429, and the next year the bishop decided to send Patrick to Rome for an interview with the Vicar of Christ.

## *The Triumph of Failure*

At this time the pilgrim, nearly sixty, was still strong despite long journeys through the disregarded years. "The dignity of his age and the inbred honor of his grey head" were as naught compared with his burning desire to evangelize Erin. As he set out on the difficult journey Romeward, it must have

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

seemed like a second spring, or a St. Martin's summer, so high were his hopes. Over the Alps he hastened, exerting himself mightily along the imperial highway until he reached the Eternal City. "O Lord Jesus Christ," he prayed, "lead me, I beseech Thee, to the chair of the Holy Roman Church, that receiving authority there to preach with confidence Thy sacred Truths, the Irish nation, by my ministry, may be gathered to the fold of Christ." Now no one knew better than Patrick that the Roman pontiffs carried out the divine commission to feed the lambs and the sheep. No doubt he could have named countless missionaries despatched from Rome to labor in Europe, Asia and Africa. On arriving at Vatican hill therefore he lost no time in following out Germanus' instruction. Pope Celestine, whom Patrick sought out, occupied the Chair of Peter in the baleful presence of heretic and barbarian. The troublesome Nestorius, finally unmasked at the Council of Ephesus, still exerted great power, and the barbarian invasion continued, yet Celestine, a truly great pontiff, ruled firmly and successfully. Though weighed down with the heaviest of cares he had managed to send a missionary, Palladius, to Ireland. That happened just a year before Patrick reached Rome; and as a result the old pilgrim's appeal fell on deaf ears, in fact the Pope paid no heed to him at all.

### *End of the Road*

In trial, it is said, men act well or ill according to their previous life which is then and there revealed by their conduct. Instead of giving up the idea of his mission, Patrick bided his time in faith and hope. A bare glimpse of his odyssey at this trying period is given in his own words: "I had with me the fear of God, as the guide of my path through Gaul and Italy, as well as in the islands of the Mediterranean Sea." Italy,

## *Saint Patrick and the Fifth Century*

observe, was overrun by barbarians, the islands pirate-infested, yet Patrick who describes himself as "a sinner untaught and most countrified," travelled through them unafraid. In the meantime, Palladius had gone forth to convert the warlike Scots, only to meet with failure and the end of all mortal plans — "Ireland lay under the wintry cold; these fierce barbarians received not his doctrine readily, nor did he himself wish to remain long in a land not his own; wherefore he returned to him who sent him. On his way, however, after passing the first sea, having begun his land journey, he died in the land of the Picts." <sup>3</sup>

The very next year Patrick's heaven-inspired plan was realized. In the words of Holy Writ, "The eye of God looked upon him for good, and lifted him up from his low estate and exalted his head; and many have wondered at him and have glorified God Who prepared with him a covenant of peace and made him a prince." The record of that belated triumph is very vague, there being less than a dozen words to throw light on the great event; but the truth of the matter can be recaptured, and in all likelihood is as follows: At the foot of the Alps lies the town of Iurea, ancient Eborea, on the route from Ravenna to Gaul and Ireland. It was here Patrick learned the news of the death of Palladius; here too he was, quite certainly, consecrated *in conspectu Celestini, in conspectu Germani*.

The bishop who governed that region was St. Maximus, a fearless leader so kindred in spirit to Patrick that heaven used his holy hands to anoint the Apostle of Ireland. One gets a further glimpse of Maximus, strong as adamant, when Attila stormed down upon Italy. As spiritual ruler of Turin, fully aware of his apostolic duty, he heartened his panicky flock when news came that the Hun was not far off. "We

<sup>3</sup> *Book of Armagh*, fol. II

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

see you," he said, "fortifying the gates of the city; but it is the primary duty of strengthening the gates of justice which presses down upon you . . . for it avails nothing to defend the walls with bulwarks and at the same time provoke God by sin." Turin, be it said, was one of the few cities of northern Italy which escaped the ravages of the scourge of God.

But enough of the scene — time, place and principals — of the victory of Patrick's vocation. Behold now the newly consecrated bishop himself, armed with full authority, ready if need be to face martyrdom. Youth had passed, and middle age, but at long last the prisoner of hope is free to preach the glory of God to the Irish. All the failures, difficulties, oppositions foreseen and unforeseen, all the years of dream and delay are gone forever; the just man of God has his way, God's way, in the end. Westward, through the Alpine passes he hastens, along the familiar Roman road to Auxerre where he finds his beloved patron, Germanus. What a meeting that must have been! Soon the pilgrim embarked on the most wonderful missionary career in the Dark Ages. Can you not fancy Patrick's thoughts when from land's end he looked out upon the endangered sea, straining towards the island of his destiny? No script exists to tell us of those grace-laden hours, but history was to prove his second arrival in Ireland an event of world-wide importance.

### *Gospel Paths in Ireland*

The land of Patrick's holy desire had been thrice-colonized — first by the Firbolgs, next by Tuatha de Danann, then by the Scots whom the missionary found in power. Two races, conqueror and conquered, dwelt together side by side in spite of their marked difference. Those whom Patrick called "Sons of Scots" and "daughters of princes" were bold, honorable, daring and bountiful. High statured, with fair skin,

## *Saint Patrick and the Fifth Century*

golden or brown hair and blue eyes, they exhibited graces of mind and manners far above those they ruled. One of them, Conaire Mor the chief, is pictured as "tall, illustrious, with cheeks dazzling white, sparkling black pupils in blue eyes glancing, and curling yellow hair." Another, Queen Meave, is described as a "beautiful, pale, long-faced woman, with long, flowing, golden yellow hair; upon her a crimson cloak, fashioned with a brooch of gold over her breast." The other race, Tuatha de Danann, were dark-haired, dark-eyed, of medium stature — Dub, Dond, and Dorche, that is, black, brown and dark. These were regarded as "vengeful plunderers and adepts in the black and terrible mysteries of Druidism," having for their priests wily men trained in magic as well as in forms and doctrines of ancient paganism. Each chief had his Druid, and every Druid commanded a guard of thirty warriors. Obviously Irish pagan priests formed a wealthy order, "accustomed" as Patrick describes their avarice, "to borrow money to be repaid in the life to come" — *Druidae pecuniam mutuo accipiebant in posteriore vita reddituri*. Easy to see, too, how the Christian message would appeal far more effectively to the dominant race which did homage to courage than to this dark people benighted by evil doings and false teachers. The Scots, ever a hardy, war-bent people, served their local chiefs, elected from the royal family, under the rule of one king; the rest of the folk were divided into "base kins" and "free kins," each territorial division having its king and judges. Their common law, called the Brehon law (unique in the West, and nowise related to Roman or Semitic law), consisted of an amazing collection of statutes from which our modern law-makers could learn much to their profit. Nial of the Nine Hostages (379-405) reigned supreme when Patrick dwelt there as a slave; his nephew Dathi, who succeeded to power, met his death by lightning in the Alps

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

when on his marauding way to Italy; just four years after Dathi's death, Nial's son, Laeghaire, had become Ard Righ, the all-powerful ruler.

Thirty-nine years had elapsed since Patrick had last seen Ireland. On his return, in 432, he possessed a double commission, one direct from God, the other from the Vicar of Christ. Again he was an exile in this country, and yet he was no exile; rather a lover of Christ, one at home anywhere in God's world. The Irish people certainly were not strangers, for no one knew better the way it was with them. Therefore to his holy task Patrick addressed himself, confident in the fact that the Celt wanted the truth. That hazards, miseries, delays lay ahead, meant nothing to a man of this saint's moral strength. Was he not waging a holy war against fear and unfaith, greed and ignorance? There were foes aplenty — the Ard Righ,\* proud chiefs and their cynical Druids — ready to resist him to the teeth, but he had no doubt that the powers of evil would be uncovered. By some dark magic the Druids seem to have divined that the apostle came to chant their requiem; anyhow they warned the chiefs of the unwelcome visitor's approach, even describing the old bishop saying Mass.

Adze-head (i.e., the tonsured one) will come with a crook-head-staff (crosier): in his house head-holed (chasuble) he will chant impiety from his table (altar) from the front (the eastern part) of his house all his household (attendants) will respond. So be it! So be it!

As Patrick reached shore, the land of Wicklow felt the tread of his sacred feet, but not for long. Nathi, a fierce chieftain, who had previously driven Palladius away at the request of an angry high-priest, tried the same thing on the newcomer. But the seasoned traveller had a cool, deep mind able to cope with a foe of any sort; he and his party quietly reëmbarked, sailed to the north and landed in Meath. Here he was joined

## *Saint Patrick and the Fifth Century*

by a native child, Benignus, who by the grace of God would stay always with the apostle and succeed him in the See of Armagh. The little group proceeded farther to the north, landing in Down where the Druids again got wind of the missionary's coming. On seeing Patrick, the prince of the province, Dichu, disdaining to draw his sword, set his wolf-hound on the old man, but the great beast stopped in his tracks as rigid as a stone. And when the powerful chief, taken aback, raised his weapon to strike, sword-arm and blade became pinned to the air by some strange power. Fear grew in his soul, then faith lighted it, and he allowed the apostle to depart unharmed.

### *God's Ways and Means*

There was one man in all Ireland whom Patrick dearly wanted to see — Milcho, his old master. But the Ulster chief, half in fear, half in rage at the return of his runaway slave, gathered his treasures in his house, set it on fire, and perished in the flames. The apostle, seeing the blaze from afar, paused in his journey, and after three hours of silence and prayer exclaimed, "That is the fire of Milcho's house, after his burning himself in the middle of the house, that he might not believe in God in the end of his life." <sup>4</sup> We can be sure that this event left a deep impress on the people, high and low; it was the first dread stroke of the Almighty so visible in the Christian invasion. Inspired, Patrick made a bold move which was to win the day for his Divine Master. By direct challenge he carried the fight to the enemy, meeting them, so to speak, in spiritual combat. Only by such an attack can the evil influence of the Druids be destroyed. Only in this way can the chiefs and their clans make sure that he is a man sent of God. Yes, aided by Heaven he will

<sup>4</sup> *Tripartite Life*, p. 383

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

uphold the faith before all men.. The Easter pagan festival of the year 433 was at hand when the Ambassador of Christ, having spent all of Lent in prayer and fasting, made ready for the attack. Leaving Slane, he proceeded to Tara hill, and in plain sight of the royal palace lit the Easter fire. Now the Ard Righ had long since given command that Patrick be driven from the island. And lo! here at his doorstep was the despised apostle defying his authority and the Druid law. Did not this brazen stranger know that death was the penalty for anyone who dared blow a spark on Easter-eve before the priests lit their ritual fire?

Ireland never forgot that fire on Tara's hill. It was plainly kindled by Patrick to praise and glorify the Risen Savior — the Light of the World. For the first time the true Easter light shone in the darkness of northern paganism, but the darkness did not as yet comprehend it! The impact of Patrick's deeply religious act, however, was immediate, and startling. On seeing the embers' glow from his palace window, Laeghaire mounted his chariot, determined to put the offender to death. "Nay! nay!" the Druid priests cautioned him. "Stay away from that fire and send at once for the law-breaker." This Laeghaire did, and Patrick approached his sworn foes unfearingly: "They were before him, and the rims of their shields against their chins, and none of them rose up before him (i.e., to welcome him) except one man alone, Erc, son of Daga. . . . Patrick blessed him, and he believed in God." Directly the cunning Druids challenged Patrick, using the most subtle of their black arts. A display of rival powers followed in which the old apostle by divinely shaped strategy exposed the tricks of the magicians and laid low their most powerful priest, Luchru. This thing was against all reason, all calculation, and the infuriated Druids incited their chiefs to do away with the Christian

## *Saint Patrick and the Fifth Century*

newcomer. They were foiled, however, when a terrific tempest broke upon the milling crowd, darkness prevailed and in a panic of fear the pagans slew each other. To all of them the meaning of such a visitation must have been unmistakable. The Lord had clothed Patrick's enemies with confusion, while His sanctification had flourished upon the faithful missionary.

### *Light and Darkness*

The following day, Easter Sunday, the apostle appeared again at Tara, much to the Ard Righ's astonishment. A new power, hostile to Irish ways of life, had come into their midst, an influence which must be secretly disposed of at once. So they tried to poison the enemy, but failed when he blessed the proffered goblet, and the poison fell out in the sight of all. That, one might suppose, would be enough for the plotters, but such was far from the case. Though they had faltered and failed, yet there was a last chance. The Celts, be it said, love a trial of strength, not so much for the sake of victory as for the sake of the combat itself, the power of endurance. They proposed with crafty guile that the Saint match wonders with them before the King and his court. Again, after using every trick in their bag, they were badly worsted. With the boldness of his own fearless faith Patrick then proposed — an ordeal by fire! In a fiercely blazing structure of faggots and green wood the Druid Luchat Mael met his death while Benignus, Patrick's beloved assistant, escaped unscathed. Losing no time, the apostle preached to the astounded onlookers, teaching them about the Holy Trinity and making the mystery clear in the simple form in which it is written in the shamrock's triple leaf. The Queen, wonderful to say, embraced the true faith, many of the court followed her brave step, and that Easter day at Tara became known ever after as the birthday of Christian Ireland.

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

Up to this time, the missionary's holy hands had been quite tied; but now in 433, with Laeghaire's permission to preach, he converted the Ard Righ's brother, Conall, together with the famous bard, Dubtach. You see him presently on his way to the west where for seven years he evangelized Connaught. By 440 he was back in Ulster, sowing the good seed far and wide, founding the Church of Armagh. Next the province of Leinster was visited; though once rejected there the saint met with a hearty reception and received many into the true fold. From Leinster he moved on into Munster where among others the formidable Aengus, son of the King, was baptized. We are apt to think that the way was easy for Patrick, the work effortless. Far from it; for while there is no record of martyrdom on Irish soil in those first days, none the less such conquests of the faith brought tears and trials; more than once Patrick's life was imperilled, seven times he and his companions were imprisoned. But the acknowledged holiness and eloquence of the great apostle could not be denied and it became increasingly clear that the future of Ireland lay in his hands. Old men, chiefs and clansmen, the bravest of the brave laid down their arms and quietly submitted to being instructed in the truths of the Captain of Salvation. In a little while the Druid snakes in the grass fled seaward; their black magic disappeared with them as mysteriously as the ebbing tide on Erin's shores. And less than a decade after his arrival, the apostle and his beloved Benignus stood side by side with the Ard Righ Laeghaire, his chiefs, bards and brehons, in a great council of the nation, gathered for the purpose of remodelling the laws of Ireland on a Christian basis.

Never was there such a peaceful Christian penetration as that effected by this extraordinary missionary. Who can explain the resurrection of Erin from darkness to light? How,

## *Saint Patrick and the Fifth Century*

one may ask, could this miracle have been achieved? Well, to begin with, Patrick's insight was glowing, incandescent in charity; his approach was friendly and straightforward, intelligent and understanding. With unfailing judgment he accepted both Scots and Tuatha de Danann, appraising their laws and literature at their true worth. Then, aided by God, he diligently sowed the seeds of faith in their eager hearts, "working from above and not from below." His method was to win their leaders first — chiefs, bards and brehons, upon whom he later conferred spiritual authority over the rank and file. No coercion, no conversions at the point of the sword, but an inspired and inspiring appeal to a people gifted with natural faith. In that natural faith of the Irish you have another clue to the mystery of their rapid conversion. The Celts are a race who believe themselves to be strangers from another country, dwelling half on this earth, half in a land of mystery. They regard the whole world with wonderment; earth, air and sea effect a mysterious but powerful influence upon them. Now all this proved divinely opportune and Patrick was quick to profit by the traits of the folk he knew and loved so well. Once his hearers grasped the nature of his power they responded readily to "the truth that is in Christ Jesus." An ardent people, their souls went out to greet the Friend of publicans and sinners; inured to suffering, they fell in love with the Man of Sorrows; used to do homage to sacrifice, they could clearly glimpse Calvary. For the rest, the Easter fire with its sublime message brought the Light of Life into their poor dark hearts. Never a day but great crowds pressed upon the inspired preacher to hear the Word of God. Enthusiastically they accepted the faith, energetically they professed it, and the tragedy of human passion in their hearts was replaced by the triumph of love of God and of neighbor. If you look at these facts you will understand

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

how paganism quickly disappeared from Erin, root and branch, while in its place Christianity flowered, exhaling its sweetest fragrance.

### *The Dying Empire*

Ireland, cloistered by the northern ocean, continued to yield the fruits of the faith, but alas! it was another story and a sad one throughout the Empire. Hun, Goth, and Vandal, had fixed their covetous eyes on Christian lands. It was only a short time before they came, saw, conquered, leaving smoking ruins in their path. Only the Rock of Peter was strong enough to withstand these inexhaustible barbarian waves. Pope Innocent (401-417), who felt their impact when the Goths sacked Rome, was alive to the great responsibility of the papacy's winning them to the cause of Christ. And Pope Celestine (422-432), who had sent Patrick to Ireland, aghast at the havoc wrought on every side, died after a tempest-tossed decade which saw much distress within and without the Church. He could not have dreamed that Patrick's going was in reality the first step in the divine solution of the hopeless barbarian question. In 439 his successor, Sixtus III, despatched three bishops to aid the apostle in spreading the Gospel, and this in the face of increasing difficulties surrounding the Western Church. The wars and campaigns of a wobbly Empire plus the disrupting schisms and heresies of the hour demanded a giant in the Chair of Peter. Leo the Great (440-461) was the one God chose for the tremendous task of preserving unity through faith. An able scholar, incredible diplomatist, and fearless champion, he kept the Church strong amid dire perils; indeed, his reign ranks second only in importance to that of Gregory I. Patrick is said to have visited Pope Leo in the year 442, receiving his approval of the faith in Ireland. What a contrast the Vicar of

## *Saint Patrick and the Fifth Century*

Christ and his missionary must have observed between the peace of God settling over Erin and the divine wrath visited on the Empire which had so wickedly persecuted the early Christians. In 451 Attila, the Hun, having ravaged northern Italy led his ruthless barbarians to the very gates of Rome where Leo prevailed upon him to return to the East. The black cloud had scarcely vanished when the Vandals under Genseric crossed over from Africa, besieged Rome from the Tiber and sacked the City. Though they spared the great buildings, thousands were carried off to slavery. After two decades of magnificently consistent rule the great Pope was succeeded by Hilary whose task as Supreme Pastor was to pave the way for peace with the victorious barbarians.

The glory that was Rome came to an end in 476 when Odoacer, the Goth, was hailed King of Italy. Any thought of destroying the Empire itself did not occur to the barbarian leader who venerated the old ideals and institutions even when he was invading territories. Half a century earlier Alaric's successor, Adolphus, had played nobly the part of a Roman general, married the Emperor's sister, adopted the Roman dress; he even opposed the fiercer barbarians who rode roughshod in Spain. Goths, after all, were of a decent nature, quite unlike either Huns or Vandals, so their barbarism eventually disappeared; and Gothic chiefs like Alaric, Adolphus and Odoacer professed Christianity of a sort, but all of them were Arians who wanted no truck with the Pope of Rome. It was clear to the barbarians that the Empire of the West was now done for, so the title of Emperor went to the East where ruler after ruler proved more unreal and less potent in their sway. New trials burdened the papacy when in 489 Theodoric attacked King Odoacer, murdered him in cold blood, and conquered Italy, giving one-third of the land to his Ostrogoth soldiers and taking over Ravenna for his

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

court city. Nor were conditions any better in the Eastern Church. At Antioch and Constantinople there was riotous disorder, brought about by mischief-makers who brazenly supported Basilicus, the schismatic bishop. But with the restoration of Zeno, the Emperor, came a change for the better; he straightway sent to Pope Felix II a confession of faith and a vow to support orthodoxy. Another promising event towards the century-end, was the baptism of Clovis and his Franks. The warlike leader had married a Christian saint, Clotilda, but stubbornly resisted all her sincere efforts to convert him. However, he made a vow that if the Alemanni met defeat at his hands, the God of the Christians would be his God. Having won the victory, Clovis with 3000 of his warriors received Baptism on Christmas day, 496; then he proceeded at Bishop Remigius' command "to adore what he had burnt, and to burn what he had adored." As the battle-scarred chief passed through the ranks of holy monks he addressed the old saint — "Sir, is this heaven already?" "No," was Remigius' ready reply, "but it is the road thereto." Alas, many a decade would pass before the war-weary West would find that road and embrace its true Master as He was already known and loved in that little island far to the north.

### *In God's Green Garden*

Beyond the broken Empire Patrick lived on in holiness and justice till the year 492. He had long since retired from the government of the See of Armagh and had consecrated three hundred and fifty bishops, besides visiting all the churches, monasteries and convents. The evening of his life was spent in prayer and penance, enriching the Gospel he had preached, edifying all with the holy thoughts of old age. Had not God Who vouchsafed to send Patrick to Ireland, enabled him to accomplish all that he was commanded to do? Truly then he

## *Saint Patrick and the Fifth Century*

could never thank the Heavenly Father enough for granting his heart's desire; for confirming his teachings by so many signs and miracles. Every Lent the old Bishop was wont to go up to Crough-Patrick, Ireland's Mount Sinai, and plead with the Most High that his cherished people never deviate from their faith. How could they do other than obey the teachings of this man, so love-enlightened, who shed holiness everywhere like dew on the fleece? With true Celtic sweetness the ancient chronicle voices their affection when it speaks of Patrick as "a fair flower garden to children of grace; a flaming fire; a lion in strength and power; a dove in gentleness and humility." A wonderful God-conscious life had assuredly been his, even from childhood. And what a unique rosary of golden years he could count! Over half a sorrowful decade spent in exile among the Scots, four hopeful decades in pilgrim preparation, six glorious decades as an apostle among people dear to his heart. All that remained now was to wait in divine patience for the hour when the Great Husbandman should summon him to an accounting of his unfailing stewardship. Near the threshold of eternity, the apostle, surrounded by holy monks and nuns, asked to be anointed by one of his own bishops. He reached journey's end on March 17, 493, in his monastery at Saul, and passed into that higher life, which is a life of peace.

The work of Patrick, great as it was in his lifetime, had scarcely begun. It would be continued by his devoted disciples for centuries to come. Indeed, a litany could be written of the saint's children in Christ: saints, scholars, missionaries, at home and abroad. St. Benignus in Erin, St. Ciaran at Ard Typrait, St. Enda at Arran (480), St. Columba at Iona (521-579), St. Finnian at Clonard (530), St. Kevin at Glendalough (about 544), St. Comgall at Bangor (552), St. Brendan of Clonfert (555), St. Columban in Bur-

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

gundy and Lombardy (d. 633), St. Carthach at Lismore (635), and St. Cataldus (640). This list might be greatly enlarged, nor can we omit the names of St. Mochta at Lough, and, above all, St. Brigid, the most remarkable Irish woman of the fifth century. The daughter of Dubhthach, a Leinster chieftain, Brigid proved so loyal a friend and co-worker of Patrick that the two were said to have but one heart and one mind. Her nunnery in Kildare, the Church of the Oaks, became a center from which radiated houses of piety and learning throughout all Ireland. Young beautiful girls by the hundreds, daughters of warriors, princesses of noble birth, entered the religious life and vowed to serve Christ all their days. You can easily imagine how they must have sunned God's green garden and enriched its growth with the Gospel of peace and love. "There was no desert," the Acts of the Martyrs affirm, "no spot, no hiding place in the island, however remote, which was not peopled with perfect monks and nuns."<sup>6</sup> These were the heralds of a new dawn who would carry the torch of learning to illumine the Dark Ages. Already in the westernmost isle of the seas, hermits could be seen leaving their cells, gathering about them eager novices into monastic colonies. Great schools arose — Clonard, Moville, Glasnevin, Clonmacoise — where monks from overseas sought direction from able masters who taught the sacred scriptures and the practice of ascetism. Spain, Gaul, Italy, all looked to Ireland as a spiritual power-house to assist in the rebuilding of Christendom. And presently, as Newman writes, "Many holy and learned Irishmen left their own country to proclaim the faith, to establish or to reform monasteries in distant lands, and thus to become the benefactors of almost every nation in Europe."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Acts of the Martyrs*

<sup>7</sup> *Hist. Sketches*, vol. III, p. 126

# Saint Benedict

## THE IDEAL MONK

# SAINT BENEDICT AND THE SIXTH CENTURY

<i>Emperors and Kings</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
	Goth and Vandal, Frank and German rule the old Roman Empire 500	ST. SYMMACHUS, 498-514
	Great monastic movement in Ireland 500	
	Theodoric, Ostrogoth, King of Italy 500	
	Benedict dwells in cave at Subiaco 500	
THEODORIC, d. 526	Clovis overwhelms Visigoths in Spain 507	
	Benedict promulgates his rule 510	
	Gospel preached in Far East 515	ST. HORMISDAS, 514-523
	Reunion of Roman and Greek Churches 519	ST. JOHN I, 523-526
	Birth of St. Columba Apostle of Iona 521	ST. FELIX IV, 526-530
	St. Finnian (Irish) at Menevia in Wales 525	BONIFACE II, 530-532
JUSTINIAN, emperor of East, 527-565	Benedict settles at Monte Cassino 529	JOHN II, 533-535
	Emperor plans to win Europe and Africa 530	ST. AGAPITUS, 535-536
	Belisarius captures Rome for Empire 533	ST. SILVERIUS, 536-537
	South Spain reconquered	VIGILIUS, 537-555
	Belisarius captures Rome for Empire 536	
TOTILA (Goth)	Belisarius captures Ravenna 540	
	Birth of Gregory, the Great 540	
	King Totila visits Benedict 542	
	Death of Benedict 543	
	Pope Vigilius versus Justinian 544	
	Totila recaptures Rome 549	
	Second Council of Constantinople 553	
	Ostrogoths leave Italy 553	
	Belisarius regains parts of Spain 554	
	Birth of Isidore of Seville 560	PELAGIUS I, 555-560
ALBOIN (Lombard King) 561	St. Columba (Irish) evangelizes Scotland 563	JOHN III, 561-574
	Lombards invade Italy 568	
	Birth of Mohammed 570	
	Gregory, Prefect of Rome 571	
CLEFTI (Lombard), 573	Gregory becomes a Benedictine 575	BENEDICT I, 575-578
	Lombards pillage Monte Cassino 580	PELAGIUS II, 579-590
	Pope Pelagius welcomes the Benedictines 581	
TIBERIUS, d. 582	The Great Plague breeds in Egypt	
AUTARI (Lombard), 584	St. Columban (Irish) in Brittany 590	ST. GREGORY THE GREAT, 590-604
	Agilulf converted to Catholicism 590	
AGILULF (Lombard), 591	Pope Gregory conciliates the Lombards 593	
	St. Columban in Burgundy, and Bobbio, Italy	
	Augustine, O.S.B., sent to Britain 596	
	Leander converts Spanish Visigoths 599	
	Monte Cassino deserted for a century	

## SAINT BENEDICT AND THE SIXTH CENTURY

### *Rome in the Mire*

In the opening decade of this century a young man in his late teens could have been seen hard at work in the Roman schools. The official register listed him — Benedict of the Anisii, born in Nursia, Umbria; but his friends knew him to be the scion of an old family, famous for having given more virgins to the Church than consuls to the Empire. That honor, however, meant little to Benedict who had begun his studies "with hope at the prow and fancy at the helm" only to find himself face to face with grim pagan facts: Rome, ruled by Theodoric the Goth, had become barbarian ridden, and the Vicar of Christ, Symmachus, was threatened by an anti-Pope. All about the noble youth hung a dark haze of disorder; the city itself an abyss of servitude, its citizens strayed from heaven's laws, its schools sinks of corruption, where boys grew to be slaves of sin before they arrived at man's estate. By the grace of God, Benedict had eschewed the dissolute life of his schoolmates and, though tempted himself by the offer of a woman's love, had chosen the way of the counsels. And just now, avid for a life hidden with Christ in God, his thoughts ran deep, dynamic, for Benedict was a student who had no illusions. Why bide any longer in this unholy mess, he asked himself, since all the seven liberal arts which the Roman schools had to offer were "learnéd ignorance and unlearnéd wisdom"? Plainly it was neither safe nor divinely practicable to stay on; he must seek an "out" from the vile trap where things eternally worth-

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

while availed nothing. At this painful and critical stage, Benedict decided upon flight; in company with an old nurse, he turned his back on Rome and all its evil ways. The two journeyed eastward to Enfide, a lonely village in the Simbrucini mountains, where Benedict planned to labor for that inner peace he had vainly sought amid the schools and monuments of the imperial city.

But alas, all the refugee's plans fell through when the folly of Rome caught up with him. Idle folk gave the newcomer no rest once they heard about his power of miracles. There was nothing for Benedict to do but to betake himself to some cleft in the crags, a deep far-off cavern, any place of solitude! With such a goal in mind he crossed the Anio, then climbed the steep volcanic rocks, until he found a cave in the wild rift of Subiaco. An old monk, named Romanus, meeting him on the road, took great interest in the strong, quiet-talking stranger, and when the ascetic found the newcomer's abode he made it his business to feed the hungry youth, besides instructing him and clothing him in a religious habit. Benedict continued living in this retreat "alone with the Great Alone," almost unknown to men who rarely ventured near a cave perched on the side of a precipice. But even there on the heights he was tempted, as was his Divine Master before him. One day the assaults of the impure foe became so violent that Benedict threw off his coat of skins and hurled himself bodily into lacerating brambles hoping thereby to quench the licking fires of lust. Had he not chosen solitude to seal his heart from the love of comely shape, stop his ears to ribald jest, shut out the crazy Roman world! Need anyone wonder that after these years of prayer and fasting Benedict grew to be a seasoned man of God. But again, as in Enfide, he was found out, this time by shepherds who told of the young hermit in his shaggy dress of hides, and the report of his holi-

## *Saint Benedict and the Sixth Century*

ness quickly spread over the near-by country despite all his attempts at concealment.

### *On High Mounts*

Not far from Benedict's cave was the monastery of Vicovato whose monks, the true children of their time, led an earthly life.—lax, idle, indifferent. The better element, intent on reform, came to confer with Benedict, urging the noble ascetic to rule over them. They argued and argued with such persistence that they finally succeeded in their mission, "though Benedict knew that their manners were diverse from his, and that they would never agree together." The event proved him correct; indeed, the new abbot did not suit the rank and file at all, and the rigor of his rule proved as hateful as it was impossible. Law and order had no appeal for these rebel monks; the very idea of stern discipline was utterly distasteful to their semi-barbaric nature. A few fanatics plotted to do away with the young abbot by pouring poison into his drink. At the beginning of the monastic meal they passed the deadly cup, which Benedict took and blessed. Lo! at the sign of the cross the cup broke into a thousand pieces. "The Lord Almighty have mercy on you, my brothers." Benedict addressed them very calmly. "Why have you willed to do this? Go ye all and seek for a father after your own heart." With that he departed and made his way back to Subiaco. It was not long before many earnest people, attracted by the sheer sanctity of the man, gathered about him, eagerly seeking guidance towards better things; it was amazing how anxious they were to follow in his footsteps and win on to higher life. They worked so arduously under his rule that Benedict decided to stay and direct; in no time monastic buildings arose, communities formed, and the rule

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

was carried out by willing monks under the eyes of one they deemed "father of them all." By this time Benedict had become adept in the spiritual life, a specialist in directing souls. "Let us be imitators of the Lord" was the word on his lips as he humbly went about forever striving to live up to the highest he knew.

Directly the cluster of monasteries prospered "in Christ," schools were built for children living in the vicinity of Subiaco. Among those little Italians and Goths, there were two angelic pupils, Maurus and Placidus, who drew such inspiration from the abbot, such strength from his monks, as to become truly great members of the community. At first all went well in cloister and school, but presently Benedict's work was once more put to the acid test of trial. The humble abodes in the mountain became the cynosure of curious eyes; silly matrons, idle clerics, time-wasters of every sort broke into the monastic retreat. Never a week but they disturbed the peace, poking into corridors and cells, even brazening their way into the cloisters. Even more trying than the insolence of such shameless intruders was the hostility of jealous neighbors, unfriendly monks led by a certain Florentius. Fame, as Pope Gregory observes, arouses envy, and envy gnawed at the heart of this rebel priest and his followers who wickedly planned to scandalize the monks and compromise the holy abbot by staging a dance of naked women in the courtyard of Benedict's own monastery. When things got so bad that holy quiet disappeared into the blue heavens, Benedict arranged to leave the place in the care of local superiors, while he went further afield to make a fresh start. At a providential moment, the father of his pupil, Placidus, had made over to the monks Monte Cassino, an estate in the Apennines; after much prayer the abbot decided to go and establish another spiritual training school. So, taking a chosen band,

## *Saint Benedict and the Sixth Century*

he journeyed to the new site in the hope that they would find an abode of peace.

### *A Fortress of the Faith*

High above the ruins of Cassinum, a pre-Roman town razed by the Goths, stood an ancient temple of Apollo girded by oak-woods. The abbot's first act was to wipe out every trace of paganism. He smashed the statue, burned the grove, and used the temple stones to build a chapel of St. Martin. As the days passed the monks set to work erecting a monastery; peasants of the mountainside came to see what was afoot, returning later to worship the true God. After that the monks could be seen in the near-by villages where they attended the sick and instructed the inhabitants in Christian ways of life. Soon the whole countryside looked to the holy place on the hill as their refuge in sickness, in trial, in accident, in need. And the fame of Monte Cassino spread with such rapidity that abbots journeyed from afar to learn the Rule from Benedict himself, while men climbed the steep heights, asking admittance to the cloisters. These latter sought out the monastery as an Eldorado, to mine the pure gold of faith, "the trial of their faith being," as St. Peter said, "much more precious than of gold that perisheth." On God's mount, far beyond the corrupt world, they dug deep into veins of the inner life which yielded heavenly treasures that neither rust nor moth could consume. And many a weary heart found rest, many a troubled heart relief, many a jaded heart strength, in the peace that surpasseth all understanding. The Rule of Benedict, with its common ideal born of experience and forged by experiment, adapted itself to their deepest instincts and consulted their social needs. There is no room here to give the whole rule in detail; it is sufficient to say that it stood four-square on prayer and penance, simplicity

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

and spirituality. No novice could ever expect to be a good Benedictine monk unless his scale of values called for virtue and gentleness, inner peace and activity, self-rule and regard for the brethren.

What sort of life, you may ask, did they lead on Monte Cassino? The answer is, a hidden one given over to the service of God and man. For them life on earth was not a goal but a going — towards an eternal home! On that road, one day seemed much the same as another but each hour had its completeness, every step well taken, every task well done. United in the cords of Adam and the bonds of love, the monks labored diligently, obediently, cheerfully; they followed a system — hours of work, spare diet, religious exercises — arranged by the Superior. It mattered little what duty was assigned: pray in the chapel, copy a manuscript, dig in a garden, teach the poor, visit the sick: what really counted was the accomplishment of God's will. The presence of Benedict, "austere and exact, yet mild, gentle and courteous," had a dynamic effect on the whole community. Calm, dignified, desirous of being loved rather than feared, the abbot drew his children to him, and they came to regard him not only as the center of the little world in which they moved, but also the example of all their ideals, hopes, interests. Let them but hate sin and love the brethren, he never tired saying, then all good would follow. And it did; indeed, so rich was the life, so manifold the good works of Monte Cassino as to stir admiration not unmingled with suspicion. King Totila, unable to restrain his curiosity, sent messengers to investigate the much talked-of place. Their leader thought to deceive Benedict by feigning himself a king and dressing the part. "My son," said the abbot, "put off that which thou wearest, for it is not thine." To these hard-bitten barbarians the order, quiet, strange beauty of the monastery must have

## *Saint Benedict and the Sixth Century*

seemed like Heaven on a hilltop! One can scarcely imagine the impression created in their bewildered souls, yet one can fancy the glowing report they brought back to their King.

### *View from the Mount*

An ancient tradition declares that Benedict was given a vision in which he came as near seeing God as is possible for a man in the flesh, and in that vision the holy abbot saw the whole world. As far as one can tell, the scene he beheld from the heights of Monte Cassino must have been something like this. Italy lay in the hands of the Ostrogoths. . . . In Gaul the Frankish tribes ruled supreme, having extended their conquests to Burgundy (534), Bavaria (535) and Provence (536). . . . On the Iberian peninsula dwelt the Visigoths whom Clovis had overwhelmed in 507. . . . And in Ireland monks could be seen crossing the misty seas to spread the Gospel among the Picts, Caledonians and Britons. Alas, that the rest of Europe, peopled by Angles, Saxons, Austrasians, Avars and Lombards, was shrouded in pagan darkness. In the east the Church still struggled against a lazy, sullen Byzantine spirit, while monasticism was rapidly sinking into a morass of sloth and selfishness. One bright promise, however, remained in the person of Justinian who ruled the Eastern Empire with undisputed sway not to say unflagging zeal. A great lover of justice, this masterful Emperor codified the Roman law, dipped into theology, encouraged church building; on the other hand he was stern, domineering, intolerant, as witness his attempt to stem the tide of evil by ruling that all pagans either be baptized or lose their property and go into exile. This latter policy produced countless conversions, yet many of these, being forced, were bound to be fruitless, without real change in belief. Early in his reign the Emperor set his heart on reclaiming the whole West, so while

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

he sat hard in the royal saddle, his great general, Belisarius, began one conquest after another. After wiping out the Vandals in Africa (523), Belisarius captured Rome (536), then Ravenna (540) only to be set back by Totila, an able soldier ever on the march to win the whole of Italy.

The stalwart Gothic king, who some time before had despatched messengers to Monte Cassino, made up his mind to visit Benedict. It was a tiresome journey up the two thousand feet of rocky cliff, and when he reached the top he found the abbot sitting outside his cell. Greeting the barbarian conqueror with exquisite courtesy, Benedict showed him and his men through the monastery. The faith and nobility of their host, the courage latent in his monks were not without their effect on these visitors. They were, no doubt, greatly astonished at everything they saw and heard; most of all by Benedict's startling, unexpected prophecy, addressed to his regal guest. In the hearing of all, the fearless abbot declared that Totila would go to Rome, cross the seas, and after nine years quit this earthly scene! "Much wickedness do you daily commit," he accused the warrior, "and many great sins have you done; now at length give over your sinful life." How deeply Totila felt about all this we do not know. Did the man of blood and iron mend his ways? Did he acknowledge his dependence on God, and cease his cruelties towards the vanquished? No, he did not. And all that Benedict of Monte Cassino foretold came to pass in due time. Totila, rallying his Ostrogoths, defeated Belisarius and recaptured Rome, but a while later he embarked for Sicily, and after ten years lost both his kingdom and life. By the year 543 Benedict himself was nearing the end of his mortal span. The account of his death, so different from Totila's, reads like a joyous home-going to Heaven. Six days before the end he forewarned his disciples, giving orders to have his

### *Saint Benedict and the Sixth Century*

sepulchre opened. And as the last hour drew nigh he asked to be carried into the abbey church, where "receiving the Body and Blood of Our Savior, and having his weak body holden up between the hands of his disciples, he stood before the altar with his own hands lifted up to heaven; and as he was in that manner praying, he gave up the ghost." Holy monks saw his soul rising to heaven, clothed in a most precious garment and surrounded with light, and they beheld One of a most glorious aspect Whom they heard saying: "This is the way whereby Benedict, the beloved of the Lord, goeth up to Heaven." They buried the saint in the oratory which he had built when he overthrew the altar of Apollo, and all Monte Cassino mourned the passing of their beloved abbot from a world which would one day hail him as the Father of the Nations!

### *Black Clouds over Italy*

After the demise of Benedict there were dread days in store for the monks in their mountain-haven. For once again, as so often during the centuries, a nation whose only law was war had set out to destroy the order of civilization. Even while the saint of Monte Cassino stood dying at the altar, rumors spread of another impending Germanic invasion. The Lombards, led by Alboin, had left Pannonia and were headed south for the peninsula. As the long-beards made for the heart of Christendom, Italy, ill-defended and riven by rivalries, proved an easy prey. By 568 the fierce marauders, more savage than the Hun, more tenacious than the Goth, made it plain that they had come to stay. One after another, great cities — Milan, Liguna, Cremona, Pavia — fell before the onrush of this worst of all scourges of the earth. At Pavia, the ruthless chief, Alboin, forced Rosamunda to drink out of her father's skull, but the vengeful princess saw to it

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

that the barbarian leader was secretly murdered. Shortly after, under Clefi (573), the Lombards continued their march southward, hunting and slaying priests and monks, enslaving the people, destroying churches, sacking monasteries, burning libraries. They systematically filled up the wells, cut down great trees, burned the cross, changing the smiling face of Italy into a grim desert. Doom, as we know, hung over Rome where Gregory had to cut short his famous homilies at news of the Lombard advance. "Sights and sounds of war," he says, "meet us on every side. No one remains in the country; scarcely any inhabitants in the town. . . . Before our eyes some are carried away captive, some mutilated, some murdered. We, the survivors, are still the daily prey of the swarm and of other innumerable tribulations."

The black storm continued to rage in Italy with no signs of blowing itself out. In 580, just thirty-five years after Benedict's death, the Lombards headed for the famed abbey. Like monstrous gadflies they settled in the vicinity of the mountain, darkening earth and sky; the monks knew only too well that these barbarians had come to destroy and depopulate as they had done with sheer wantonness all along the peninsula. Give the savages a day or two to complete their infernal plans and the men of God would have to bear the brunt of their attack. It was just as the Benedictines feared. The enemy forded the Iris and, after razing the town, made straight for the holy place. A few monks managed to escape, but many were put to the sword, the Lombards displaying an especial hostility towards religious. In an orgy of hate they sacked the monastery which had enfolded the heart of Benedict, burned all the precious books in sight, sought to do away with every trace of life and love. By the time they left off, the work of three decades was undone and the great citadel of faith devastated. The abbey, alas, was

### *Saint Benedict and the Sixth Century*

silent and neglected through a whole century, yet the Benedictine heart and mind remained intact as their tradition persisted in the City of the Popes. Pelagius II welcomed the refugee monks, granting them permission to build a monastery beside the Lateran Basilica; this in turn gave the Rule of Benedict widespread publicity which won for it many worthy subjects as well as papal favor. Thus the order, far from being crushed under the ruins of their holy home, gathered strength with the years. Their destiny in defeat would shortly be revealed when they went forth to lay the sweet yoke of Christ on their would-be destroyers.

#### *The Great Pontiff Gregory*

It is said that during Benedict's early days the Pope, Hormisdas (514-523), urged him to draw up his rule as an official code for all the monks of the West. As the years went on, time justified the pontiff's judgment for many others similarly recognized Benedict's inspired genius for law and order. They well knew that the best biography of the great abbot could be read between the lines of his Rule, and in the noble lives of his followers. In fact the refugee monks of the eighties found such favor in Rome that Gregory, a scion of the house of Anicii, turned over his father's mansion in Monte Celio to the order, and later forsook his brilliant career as Prefect of Rome to take the habit of a black monk. At first the gifted novice dearly wanted to journey to Britain as a missionary and convert the Angles. Having come across some of those blue-eyed, yellow-haired slaves in a Roman market, he asked who they were; when told "Angli," Gregory replied, "*Non Angli sed angeli.*" But the Roman populace simply would not let him depart; they mobbed the Pope on his way to St. Peter's, crying out that he had sent their beloved Gregory into exile; eventually they forced the little

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

band to stay in their monastery. The Pope, however, had plans of his own; he would send the talented young monk as papal legate to Constantinople. Now no sooner had Gregory left Rome to serve the Church in the East than the Black Plague began to steal over Europe. Bred in the swamp lands of Egypt, the bubonic peril spread across Africa, over the sea to Spain, thence across the continent. Like a thief in the night it stole into hut and castle, sparing neither prince nor pauper. Its deadly miasma poisoned the land for more than half a century; as an aftermath came earthquake here, there and everywhere, destroying cities and towns alike. Pope Pelagius himself succumbed to the plague which reached Rome in 590; and later, in Antioch alone, two hundred and fifty thousand people perished from earthquake, which reduced homes, churches, and public buildings to heaps of rubble. "Some places," Gregory draws a picture of those terrible days, "are laid waste by pestilence, others are tormented by famine, others are swallowed up by earthquake." At the news of Pope Pelagius' death there was little doubt who would succeed him — none other than the monk, Gregory! Both clergy and people elected him unanimously to the papacy despite the holy man's desire to lead a simple hidden life.

There followed a pontificate perhaps the most renowned in the annals of the Church. As a matter of plain fact, Pope Gregory's "exercise of power was one of the greatest moments in world-history." Never certainly was there a more versatile ruler, nor one who knew better the needs of Church and State. Think of Gregory's talents — preacher, biblical scholar, administrator, statesman, commander of a navy, relief expert, musician, liturgist and — Saint! Though dogged by

## *Saint Benedict and the Sixth Century*

ill-health, he managed to accomplish incredible tasks, proving a pillar of strength, moral, and spiritual. Once in the Chair of Peter, he proceeded to oust the time-servers in the papal court and clear the deck for Catholic action. Next, the estates known as "Peter's Patrimony" — fifteen hundred square miles — were administered wholly in the interests of charity. With an amazing aptitude for affairs, he kept in touch with Spain, Gaul, Ireland and the East; with equally inspired wisdom he made peace with the Lombard conqueror and fearlessly upheld the rights of the Holy See against the trickeries of the Patriarch of Constantinople. Nor would he yield an inch to the officious and powerful Justinian in the matter of spiritual jurisdiction, though he always accepted the Emperor's civil authority. For the Bride of Christ he had the deepest love and while he protected the rights of each and every individual church he demanded from them constant loyalty to the Holy See. High above all mundane conflicts this "servant of the servants of God" as Gregory styled himself, envisaged a better world to come, a world in which the rights of religion and human rights would have their due place. But by far the greatest of his achievements was to launch the Benedictines on their mission of winning the West for Christ. Bad as it was, he reasoned, did not barbaric Europe belong to God? Was it not to be made worthy of Him? Yes, for this very thing he himself had been drafted from the inner peace of the cloister. Should he, then, who had the power of the Vicar of Christ, remain indifferent, unChristian? No, nor his brethren either. Now of all times myriads were hungering and thirsting for the truth in Christ; their souls like the fallow fields of Europe demanded attention. The conclusion was inescapable so, throwing his great influence behind the black monks, Pope Gregory made clear to them that if the battle

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

against the powers of darkness was to be won, they must fare forth and plant the truth among the new nations.

### *Destiny in Defeat*

The sons of St. Benedict, armed only with faith and love, set out to do their work in the chaotic world. Two vital tasks confronted them — the conversion of the barbarians and the conquest of the Black Death. Into the welter of fear and ruin they went to win back both the earth and its dwellers to the peace of God. The forces they exercised, physical and moral, religious and cultural, are simply beyond estimate. They first chose remote places in Italy for their abode; woods and waters, deserts and moors were always dear to them as the work of God's hands, while man-made cities and towns they regarded as breeding places of sin and evil. "They found a swamp, a thicket, a rock, and they made an Eden in the wilderness. They destroyed snakes, they extirpated wild-cats, wolves, boars, bears; they put to flight or they converted rovers, outlaws, robbers."<sup>1</sup> None ever improved their lands more than the monks, by building, cultivating and other methods. Is it not easy to see how they succeeded eventually in renovating society, so tireless was their apostolate, so sublime their patience? Time for them merged very closely into Eternity as they followed a divine pattern of living and spent day after day in endless, love-lit service. Near-by folk, native and barbarian, came very soon to know the black-clad strangers as skilful, courteous, enthusiastic workers, and sought in their own crude way to copy them. Thus many settled down in the vicinity of a monastery where the monks taught them how to sow and water, plow and reap, and build themselves homes; small wonder then that remote

<sup>1</sup> "Mission of St. Benedict" by John H. Newman in *Historical Sketches*, vol. II, p. 398

## *Saint Benedict and the Sixth Century*

desert places became gardens, orchards grew in wastelands, and towns rose out of nowhere. But still more wonderful was the way their doctrine gathered as the rain, their example distilled "as a shower upon the herb, and as drops upon the grass." By little and little faith broke upon barbarian souls, good works followed; then peace and order, which lagged at the start, grew apace when schools drew the children of the invaders. Lo and behold, unfriendly urchins, when taught to read the old Latin works and the sacred scriptures, responded to gentle discipline and presently gave up their wildness for Christian "manners and habitudes of life." And as they learned to love the monks, new ideas quickly supplanted the old, and Christian character was firmly shaped.

The Benedictine army was on the march and their early campaigns for God were being crowned with success. It still must be kept in mind that their work in the barbarian world was merely beginning. A great advance was made, none the less, when the fierce Lombards began to change their ways, many of them embracing the Catholic faith. In 590, King Agilulf whose wife was a Catholic, became a convert, and a host of his warriors followed him into the fold. The Church won their respect and obedience. They championed in a crude way the cause of the monks. Then by degrees they came to adhere to Roman ideas of law and order, liberty and civilization. Such a miraculous transformation reads like a solution of the ancient riddle in sacred scriptures:

Out of the eater came something to eat  
And out of the strong came something sweet.<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime Pope Gregory had despatched Augustine, O.S.B., to Britain to convert the Angles. The party of forty monks who set out in 596, stopped over at Lerins in Gaul and,

<sup>2</sup> Judges XIV, 14

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

having crossed the sea, disembarked at Sandwich. King Ethelbert of Kent met them and permitted the preaching of Christianity among his subjects; on Christmas day, 597, the ruler himself received Baptism together with over ten thousand of his subjects. And before the close of the century the faith began to take deep root, its center being the old Roman-British church outside the walls of Canterbury. Alive as ever to the needs of the Church abroad, Gregory gathered a band of monks to assist Augustine; at the same time he planned the great work of Leander whom he sent to aid the hard-pressed Catholics in Spain. The two had met years before in Constantinople and Gregory knew the learning and sanctity of his friend. Leander, a gifted orator and zealous missionary, received the pallium in 599; as Archbishop of Toledo he not only reformed the liturgy and headed the great councils, but also converted the Spanish Visigoths from the errors of Arianism.

### *Pillars of the Church*

Irish monks, meanwhile, had been evangelizing the north of Europe. They crossed over to the Isles, then to Britain; they swept across Gaul and into Switzerland and Italy; they even breasted the dread swamps of the Rhineland where fierce German tribes worshipped Thor and Woden. St. Ronan went to Cornwall and chose for his hermitage a wood full of wild beasts; later he sailed for Brittany where he founded Lucronan. In 563 St. Columba, poet and scholar, founded Iona and spent thirty-five years evangelizing the highlands of Scotland. St. Fridolin, a contemporary of Columba, having planted the gospel seed in Switzerland and other provinces as far as Augsburg, ended his days on an island in the Rhine. In 590 St. Columban and his monks set out to preach, first in Britain, then in Brittany, and after 591

## *Saint Benedict and the Sixth Century*

in Austrasia. St. Gaul, who in 610 accompanied Columban to Alemannia, settled on Lake Constance, while the latter crossed over to Italy, dying in the great abbey of Bobbio in the Apennines. On their gospel way these Irish monks met up with other pioneers of the Spirit, all joining forces in the common cause. Holy hands clasped across the nations, loyal hearts beat as one, as they bridged the continent itself by their missionary endeavor. Sons of St. Martin, sons of St. Patrick, sons of St. Benedict co-worked "in Christ," in order that justice and peace might kiss, and unbelievers be brought into the flock. The fact is these monks bore remarkable resemblance to the saints of the Old Testament, "who by faith conquered kings, wrought justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions."<sup>3</sup> And by a divine law of compensation the Church first nourished and then was herself nourished by the new life-blood of the barbarians. Of highest importance to the whole development of Europe was the advance of social and spiritual freedom accomplished by these monks during the sixth and the following centuries. As we shall see, the rule of the Benedictines gradually supplanted the others, Gallic and Irish, while ever so slowly the old Roman tradition returned to the West.

While the monks did more than their part in planting the good seed, there were scholars, too, who labored among the unlettered barbarians. Among a half-dozen, three are outstanding; faithful scribes whose pens worked in the dark as they carried on through the century. Chief among them was Boetius (480-524) a first-rate thinker whose *Consolation of Philosophy* deeply affected Christendom, and forged a bright link between the Dark and Middle Ages. Boetius' influence grew apace with the centuries, serving the Schoolmen well, for his was the temper of Aristotle, the thought of

<sup>3</sup> Heb. XI, 33

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

Plato. His friend Cassiodorus (480-575), member of an ancient Roman family, made a lasting impression on the age by virtually recapturing learning for the West. Giving up high posts under the Gothic kings he founded a monastery in Viviers, Brutium, where living practice was phrased in written precept; this able monk, theologian and chronicler as well as educator, deserved the accolade "Father of the Universities," his *Institutions of Divine and Human Study* setting a pattern of studies, the Trivium and Quadrivium, which served as a foundation for later schools. Then there was Gregory of Tours (539-593) by all odds the best historian of the day despite his occasional dullness. The pages of this wide-eyed monk fairly flash when he reports the doings of such violent and colorful figures as Fredegund, Brunhilde and Chilperic. "Woe to our time," he cries, "for the study of books has perished from among us"; and small wonder, when the barbarians had wrecked all the great centers of learning, Rome, Milan, Carthage, Alexandria. Other chroniclers like Gildas the Briton (d. 512), Jordanes the Goth (550) and Isidore of Spain (560-636) contributed to the aroused interest if not always to the accurate information of their day. Though factual narrative is often mixed with exaggerations still they cast many rays of light on the slowly waning darkness and bequeath to us spirited accounts of the ups and downs of the Church in evil days. The work of these sixth-century men of letters proves beyond doubt that History was reaching out to take the hand of Religion, while Education assisted Evangelization in the slow march towards culture and civilization.

# Saint Columban

VAGRANT OF HEAVEN

# SAINT COLUMBAN AND THE SEVENTH CENTURY

<i>Emperors in East</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
MAURITUS, 602	St. Columban writes Pope Gregory 600 Augustine, Archbishop of Canterbury 601 Burgundian Bishops summon Columban 603	ST. GREGORY THE GREAT, 590-604
PHOCUS, 602-610	Columban banished from Luxeuil 610 Mohammed (b. 570) receives "revelations" 610	SABINIAN, 604-606 BONIFACE III, 607
HERACLIUS, 610-641	Establishment of St. Gaul 611 St. Columban at Milan, Italy 612 Foundation of Bobbio 613 St. Columban dies in Italy 615 Eastern Church sunk in heresy and schism 620 Mohammed's flight from his foes (Hegira) 622 Khosros lays waste Syria, Asia Minor 625 Mohammed returns in triumph to Mecca 630 Death of Mohammed 633 Arabs capture Syria 634 Death of Isidore of Seville 636 Jerusalem capitulates to the Moslem 638 Arabs enter Egypt 640 Arabs march on Persia 641	ST. BONIFACE IV, 608-615 ST. DEUDEDIT I, 615-619 BONIFACE V, 619-625 HONORIUS I, 625-638 SEVERINUS, 640 JOHN IV, 640-642 THEODORE I, 642-649 ST. MARTIN I, 649-653 ST. EUGENE I, 654-657 ST. VITALIAN, 657-672
CONSTANS II, 641-668	Arabs conquer Egypt 642 Bobbio has its first mitred Abbot 643 St. Gaul dies in his Swiss Abbey 646 Armenians cut off from Catholic unity 651 Pope St. Martin banished by Emperor 653 Wilfred, Archbishop of York 664	ST. MARTIN I, 649-653 ST. EUGENE I, 654-657 ST. VITALIAN, 657-672
CONSTANTINE IV, 668-685	Moslems attempt siege of Constantinople 670 Mass of Lombards become Catholics 671 Wilfred sees Pope Agatho 679 Wilfred imprisoned by King Egfrid 680 Boniface born in Devonshire 680 Third Council of Constantinople 680 Kilian (Irish) Apostle to Thuringia 686 Pepin restores unity to Franks 687 Moslems invade Africa 690 Willibrod labors among Frisians 690	ADEODATUS II, 672-676 DOMUS I, 676-678 ST. AGATHO, 678-681 ST. LEO II, 682-683 ST. BENEDICT II, 684-685 JOHN V, 685-686 CONAN, 686-687 ST. SERGIUS, 687-701
JUSTINIAN II (Deposed in 695)	Arabs conquer North Africa 695 Carthage falls to Arabs 697	
LEONTIUS, 698	Willibrod evangelizes Denmark 698 Christendom ringed by Moslem states 700	

## SAINT COLUMBAN AND THE SEVENTH CENTURY

### *Hope in the Dark*

The Dark Ages seem darker, if anything, during this century. Italy still lay under the Lombard yoke, Swabia was a blacked-out hinterland, the lands of the Franks and the Visigoths reeked with dreadful crimes, while Britain was, for the most part, still semi-barbarous. You will not be far wrong in picturing the West: war-scarred and heresy-ridden; broken roads, ruined Roman castles, deep timber lands; lovely streams, glorious mountains, swamps and wasteland; semi-savage Franks, Visigoths, Burgundians, Lombards; ill-clad peasants, royal ruffians, worldly clerics and ignorance everywhere. In the East, rife with moral disorder, rival creeds tore at one another's throats, while it looked as if the Church were going into total eclipse. The garden that was North Africa, already withered by the Vandals, burned dry under the fierce Moslem whose cruel reign blighted her very existence. Need anyone be surprised, therefore, that this age of blood-curdling political drama proved barren of theological thought, devoid of secular learning? With the breakdown of language there were few writers of any note, for grammar and thought had become as rude, as barbarous as the people themselves. Yet the darkest hour is often the hour nearest the dawn, and there were rays of hope amid the black despair. All the Church's labor in the fields of the world could not be in vain, though tares and cockles threatened to choke the young wheat struggling upwards. The barbarian nations, firmly rooted, will grow many bitter thorns in days to come, none the less the Church will be seen at her work plowing, sowing, watering.

As the darkness slowly merges into dawn, a stalwart,

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

sinewed abbot may be seen engaged in the midst of the struggle for God's cause. A great missionary, travelling far and wide, this giant of a man lived much of his life in the sixth century, yet the most fruitful part of his labors belongs to the seventh. There were, to be sure, other great workers in alien fields. None, however, approached his stature, not one left such a tremendous impress on the age. St. Isidore of Seville (560-636) looms large as an erudite scholar; St. Kilian (686) ranked great as an ascetic; St. Wilfred, (684-709), Archbishop of Canterbury, excelled in shrewd administrative skill. Yet Columban stands out the peerless missionary, greatest poet of his age as well as the most impressive scholar of Merovingian times. His faith in the Church of God was indestructible; he had a fierce zeal which matched his boundless energy. Here indeed was a Celt of Celts, eager, headstrong, a stickler for discipline, an imperious ruler not to be denied. Like other humans he had his faults, for this stubborn never-say-die pioneer proved impetuous as he was dauntless, passionate as he was vigorous; withal a man more "holy, more chaste, more self-denying, a man with loftier aims and purer heart than Columban was never born in the Island of Saints." No flash in the pan, this Irish abbot, you will have to agree, but a blazing torch who shed faith and hope across Europe. The monasteries he founded became light-houses in that dark sea of strife; the monks who called him Father were the most experienced missionaries of their day. And the rule Columban drew up, an iron rule, prevailed for nearly fifty years in the Celtic houses of Europe, and at one time seemed likely to rival if not surpass the rule of St. Benedict.

### *Irish Odyssey*

Columban, born in Leinster in 543, was a true child of the Irish renaissance, that great source of piety and learning

## *Saint Columban and the Seventh Century*

which endured for three hundred years. Big, talented, handsome, the lad knew no peace in his early schooldays because of the advances of wanton maidens forever seeking to win him with soft enticements. The words of Holy Writ, however, gave him pause: "Turn away thy face from a woman dressed up, and gaze not upon another's beauty, for many have perished by the beauty of a woman, and hereby lust is enkindled as a fire." There was, Columban saw, only one way safe and pleasing to God; he must not give the power of his soul to any woman. Let those fair tempters cast their alluring glances as often as they would, it was better for him to be monk-minded than a bond-man or a home-born slave to sin. One day he brought his problem to an old anchoress who told him with no mincing of words to fly the scene: "For fifteen years I have been homeless in the place of my pilgrimage and never by the aid of Christ have I looked back. Yes, and if my weak sex had not prevented, I would have gone on truer pilgrimage across the sea. And you, alive with the fire of youth, you will stay here at home in your native land with weaklings and with women? Remember Eve and Delilah and Bathsheba and the tempters of Solomon! Go forth young man, go forth, and avoid the road to ruin and to Hell!" That was enough for seventeen-year-old Columban, and he broke the news to his parents who made every effort to sway their insistent son. A dramatic scene followed when his anguished mother threw herself over the threshold to block his departure. But the determined youth, nowise deterred, stepped over her prostrate form, and heart-breaking though it must have been, left his home and loved ones forever.

Over the bogs and rivers Columban journeyed westward until he reached Lough Erne, site of the famous school,

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

Cluain-Inis. His teacher there was the great Sinnell, a hermit renowned throughout Ireland for his learning in science, sacred and profane. And so ready a pupil did the sturdy youth prove, to the old scholar's delight, that he not only composed verse after the style of Horace and Virgil, but also wrote a Commentary on the Psalms. Two years later Columban trudged his way across half the island to County Down in order to sit at the feet of another famous master, Comgall. This fervent disciple of St. Kieran had founded his own school at Bangor, a widely-known abode of saints and scholars. He it was who taught Columban the monastic discipline and later clad the aspirant in the habit of a monk. An Irish monk's training, you may be sure, was anything but easy; it demanded firm will, a stout heart, and a rugged body. The young novice's motto, "Not I, but what Thou wilt," called for stern obedience to his abbot. Nor was there any let-down in the life of the cloister. The community rose at midnight for prayer, then again at dawn, and after bearing the day's burden, retired at sundown. Seven times they prayed publicly after the example of David who wrote, "Seven times a day do I praise Thee, O Lord." There was fasting always till evening when the monks partook of a sparse meal; the rule considered fasting just as important as study, labor, and prayer. "He who would trample on the world," the abbot advised, "must trample on himself. Think not what you are, but what you will be. Do not be sure about things that perish and unsure about the better things that will last." Rigorously Columban followed those counsels, perfecting himself in learning and piety, until one day, inspired by a vision of missionary work far away, he begged Comgall to send him to foreign lands where he could spend himself for the cause of Christ. The old master having granted his request with a

## *Saint Columban and the Seventh Century*

blessing, Columban prepared to face the tragic chaos of the barbarian world.

### *In Fields Afar*

It was the year 589 when the middle-aged monk fared forth on his great missionary undertaking. The little band of twelve embarked on the Irish Sea and reached the coast of Britain, sailing no doubt under the protection of the great mariner, St. Brendan. Why their stay in the island proved so brief is not clear, but very soon the hardy travellers, braving the treacherous waters of sea and channel, made sail for the Breton coast. No sooner had they landed in this strange country than they began preaching the Word of God to folk who hungered for the bread of life. As they continued their work through perils and hazards they must have often be-thought themselves of the warning of what they might expect after leaving Holy Ireland. Look for a moment at the Land of the Franks! Only ten years after Patrick's death (496) Clovis, the fierce battler, had become a Christian; as time went on his four sons (mer-wigs all of them, i.e., great warriors) proved exceedingly bold and eager for strife. Like beasts of prey they went into action, ganged up on Sigismund, King of Burgundy, and in 523 cruelly murdered him with his entire family. Then they went on to conquer Burgundy in 524, Bavaria in 535, and Provence in 536. By the seventh century we find three different divisions of the Frankish kingdom: Austrasia, Neustria, and Burgundy—each with its own petty Merovingian king and its own mayor of the palace. All of them brought only confusion worse confounded because of their greed, lust of power and women, and wicked rivalries. In each state where they ruled nothing was secure or unchallenged; the order of the day was murder, plotting, intriguing, revenge, double-crossing. The field of Columban's labor,

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*



then, was a fierce arena under the shadow of dark power which stretched from the Channel to the Great Sea, from the Rhine to Ocean. True enough, the Irish monks found the Western Franks fairly united, but there was endless quarrelling and division between the two branches in the East: the Neustrian Franks, on the channel seaboard, retained their Roman ways, while the Austrasian Franks, along the banks of the Rhine,

## *Saint Columban and the Seventh Century*

clung to their savage code. Even worse than the habitual warlike attitude of these semi-barbarians were the low ideals of their lax clergy and this explains the absence of Christian standards among Frankish kings and courtiers as well as among the masses.

Upon reaching Burgundy the missionaries met King Guntram who urged them to stay and preach the Gospel. The invitation accepted, Columban came upon a half-ruined Roman fortress suitable for their needs, deep in a wild and rocky region of the Vosges. His first step was to provide shelter, so the monks rolled up their sleeves and set to work building a monastery — Annegray. As was only natural, progress was made slowly; and they experienced many ups and downs in the early days. Though the King offered them protection, such as it was, they well-nigh starved, subsisting on berries, wild herbs and the bark of trees. Wild beasts ranged about their living quarters, bandits besieged them on every side, yet they stuck together, equal to everything. There was no pause, no truce, no rest, as the abbot, stern, hard-working, fearless, led the way with broad wisdom. And for one and all the Irish rule proved nothing short of providential: "Never rebel in your heart, never talk as you would; never go anywhere on your own account." Oh, yes, they had mastered that lesson back in Bangor, a lesson that stood by them in many a bad fix. Once firmly established in Annegray, they partook of the roughest fare — hard biscuit, vegetables and meal mixed with water; they drank only herb-beer, dressed in the coarsest habits, killed wolves to make hide for sandal-leather. One fine day Columban came across a deep pool, then another, and after that his monks had fish aplenty for the Abbot was able to tell unerringly just where the finny creatures could be caught. Thus they lived

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

a stern sacrificial life yet dwelt in unity, a happy family indeed, where the well being of each was the concern of all.

### *Salt of the Earth*

Now the presence of such a masterful abbot and his little community could not possibly fail to command respect in the neighborhood. Their door ever open to the needy, wandering peasants began making the acquaintance of the newcomers, only to marvel alike at their physical prowess and spiritual powers. As might be expected, folk sick in body and soul came to Annegray; the poor found in the monks their truest friends; the world-weary, won by humility, gentleness and mutual charity, sought entrance into the monastery where they cheerfully submitted to the harsh iron rule. Not only did the rustics become their friends, but Gallo-Roman nobles who came to scoff, stayed to pray. The more they saw of the Irish monks the more they stood in admiration of them, and the fame of Annegray-in-the-Wilderness spread far and wide. Loving solitude as Columban did, the fresh crowds simply compelled the abbot to retire to a cave some miles away. But he managed to keep in touch with the community through a messenger whose report could be nothing but numbers, numbers and again numbers. Very soon they saw that it would be necessary to clear and dig and stone the vineyard, so great was the need of another monastery. In 590 they got to work on a new site in a wild piny district eight miles away, and used as foundation stones the ruins of Luxovium (Luxeuil), an old Gallo-Roman castle. Hot springs, stone images, ritual glades, dating back to pagan times, gave the district a desolate touch. Owls, wolves, bears frequented the old ruins which teemed with wild life, making the place even more mysterious. Despite these perils the Irish monks soon turned the uncanny site into a green oasis with "springs of

## *Saint Columban and the Seventh Century*

living water" whither multitudes hastened in search of comfort and direction. The King and his nobles used to visit the old abbot here at Luxeuil, and Augustine with his black monks from Rome stopped over on his way to the Angles in Britain. So great, in fact, was the hum and fuss of life about the place that once again Columban was obliged to fly the madding crowd — silence was God's praise and his own source of strength! On the mountainside he found a cave, and a well near by furnished him drink; best of all from the height he could see afar off his beloved monastery.

The Irish had two flourishing communities now, Annegray and Luxeuil, where choir relieved choir every hour, giving glad praise to God. About this time the abbot wrote his own rule for the monks which embodied the customs of Bangor and was instinct with the ascetic tradition of St. Patrick. And as many embraced their rule, these foundations became the miracle of the day, standing out with a glory all their own: Annegray, an asylum of charity, Luxeuil, the most important bastion of faith in all Gaul. Still more, Columban opened new schools after the Irish pattern, schools which wrought wonders with the young Franks, at first so wild and unmanageable. The abbot's great talents as scholar and disciplinarian found full outlet in these cloister-schools. As a true Christian educator, he rated training higher than instruction, moral discipline above mental culture, and he strove inspiringly to endue those semi-barbarian youths with a sense of God-given duty. At any breach of bounden charity, forbearance or politeness, there was the rod; for the lazy, lying, stubborn, there was a bread-and-water fast. If a youngster happened to be bullied by an older boy to break the Rule his answer was to be, "You know I am not allowed to do this"; if the other insisted, the boy was to say: "I will do as you command." The boy thus escaped with an act of dis-

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

obedience, but his abettor was promptly punished with three "fasts" and three "silences" during playtime. Now all these new things the monks did for tough young Franks, made only for good; their ways and lives were an open book and what they taught was bound to spread far and wide. It was inevitable, therefore, that their vigorous methods should incur the jealousy of the lax, the hostility of the undisciplined.

### *In the Thick of Trials*

There was no escaping clerical opposition either. Though bishops turned to Columban for guidance, just as powerful nobles placed their children under his care, the rank and file of the clergy frowned upon his relentless reforms, and he once wrote home, "The love of mortification was scarcely to be found even in such places." The unwavering adherence of the monks to Patrician tradition brought about fresh difficulties. Men and women alike were excluded from the cloister; church feasts, especially Easter, fell on different days. Now the Irish monastic discipline in its native land had borne the richest fruit in all Christendom; moreover the Easter date was one brought from the Pope himself by no other than St. Patrick. None the less it irked the proud Franks to be so crossed in their wont and custom by strangers within the realm. Harsh salt this, too brinish for the powers that be. In 602 the bishops assembled in council to apply their authority over religious communities and judge those rules of the Irish monks which ran counter to the laws of the Gallic Church. Lest he might lose his temper and "contend in words" Columban stayed away from the meetings but addressed to the bishops a letter the like of which they had never read before. "As to the Irish Easter," he averred, "I am not the author of this divergence. I came as a poor stranger into these parts for the cause of Christ, Our Saviour.

### *Saint Columban and the Seventh Century*

One thing I ask you, holy Fathers, permit me to live in silence in these forests, near the bones of seventeen of my brethren now dead." When the Frankish bishops persisted, Columban promptly put the matter before Pope Gregory who was ill at the time, so no reply came to Luxeuil. Another letter went to Boniface IV shortly after, but meanwhile the dire course of events had changed the plans of the abbot and his monks.

The skirmishes Columban had with purse-proud parents and intransigent bishops proved tame alongside the war he waged against the corrupt royalty of his day. Thierry, the Frankish King, though a man of evil life, had the deepest respect for the Irish abbot; he even feared the whole-souled old monk whom he found impetuous to a degree, yet possessed of astonishing intellectual and moral strength. No respecter of persons, Columban rebuked, warned, threatened the untamed King whenever he came to visit Luxeuil. And, remarkably enough, Thierry took it all, for he really loved his stern critic and friend. There was fury among the lawless Franks when they learned that Columban, bringing their King to bar, had made him give up his mistresses and enter holy wedlock as beseemed a Christian. The ire of the chieftains was nothing alongside the wrath of Thierry's mother, Brunhild, who now concentrated all her malice on Columban. One day the old Queen brought to the monastery two of Thierry's illegitimate children, brazenly demanding that Columban bless the twain. "What do you want?" the fiery abbot asked. "They are the King's sons!" she flung savagely in his teeth. "Protect them with your blessing." "No, indeed," he imperiously replied, "you may be sure they will never receive the royal sceptre." That blow, driven at Brunhild's flaming pride, was never forgiven. Anger gnawed at the old tyrant's heart and she subtly proceeded to get rid

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

of the aged abbot. A blind fool, any monk who thought he could dictate to her. Let the island breed go back to their habitat across the sea; for that matter let them be liquidated — but this the old schemer dared not do. Her hour came when Thierry succeeded as King of Burgundy; at last she stirred up his nobles and even the bishops so that Columban and all the foreign-born missionaries were ordered to leave Luxeuil where for twenty years they had labored singleheartedly, unsparing of self for the glory of God and the good of the Frankish kingdom. Worse things followed when these tyrants of the body as well as the soul resorted to armed action and threw Columban into prison at Besançon. But the doughty prisoner broke away, got back into his monastery and with a few Irish monks quit the country by way of the Loire River, going on to Nantes. The exiled abbot wrote to the monks he left behind: "They come to tell me the ship is ready. . . . Farewell, dear hearts of mine, pray for me that I may live in God. . . ." The little band of exiles, crowded in a small boat, set sail once more for distant ports.

But there were other fields! And the monks were full of hope and courage, sure that, come what might, the hosts of Hell would never prevail against God's Church. There was no time then for pangs, reproaches, or bitter memories, time only for thanksgiving that solid foundations had been laid in Luxeuil. The Franks had planned to send the monks back to Ireland, but Heaven decreed otherwise; their boat foundered when it left the river for the high seas and the tempest-tossed missionaries at last sighted landfall off the coast of Neustria. Mercifully, the going became easier after they met friendly Eastern Franks. At Soissons, King Clothaire gave the little band warm welcome, even pressed them to stay, but the abbot decided to move on to the court of the Aus-

### *Saint Columban and the Seventh Century*

trasian King, Theodobert. A great reception awaited them at Metz, whence they journeyed on to Mainz where the Rhine made its way into the dangered lands of the Suevi and Alemanni. All along this hazardous route they preached the Gospel, doing all manner of good things in Alpine towns and hills as far as Zurich. In this wild country the odds were a hundred to one against the monks until they reached Lake Constance where traces of Christianity still survived. Here it was that Columban built a church round the little, long-abandoned chapel of St. Aurelia, and Gallus preached to the natives in their own language. Even so, persecution still dogged their steps, and little wonder when the abbot with unbending courage braved the heathen in their very act of sacrifice, even pouring their libations on the ground. The fiery enthusiasm of the man, together with his severe rules of the road, wore down more than one of his monks, so it is not surprising that Gallus fell ill just when they had decided to enter new fields. Unhappily a crisis occurred the day Columban reproached poor worn-out Gallus unable to make the start. At last the abbot decided to leave the sick monk behind and go on to Italy, but not before he had imposed a terrible penance on his foremost missionary who was not to say Mass until the Master had departed this life. So Gallus remained behind with a little group who lived the hermit life while they preached the Gospel in the midst of this savage people. The picture one often sees of the saint with an ugly ferocious bear at his side only tells half the truth of those perilous days when brave Irish missionaries mixed with pagan folk as fierce as wild beasts, never flinching in combat with their pagan superstitions. Gallus wrought many miracles, curing the possessed daughter of Cunzo who was betrothed to Segebert. In gratitude the Frankish King granted the Irish monks an estate

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

near Albon, which they turned into a monastery destined to be the greatest center of arts, letters and science in all Swabia.

### *Five Seed-sown Years*

Let us return for a picture of Columban's last adventures before he died. Only a half decade remained for him as he led a little band towards Italy; five years travel-filled, crowded with action, destined soon to bring forth great things. On arriving in war-torn Lombardy the abbot, as usual, went straight to work evangelizing the peasants. Over two-score years earlier the savage Lombards under Alboin had laid waste that region, but under Agilulf those Arian-haters had calmed down somewhat. Wild as they were, Columban declared, the Kingdom of Heaven had been opened for Lombards as well as for Franks, nay for all men. God had sent him and his monks into this sick world that souls aided by grace might rise slowly to true freedom and go forward towards everlasting life. Indeed, many of them did, even the Lombard leaders who but a short time before had acted like blood-thirsty animals pacing to and fro behind bars. It was a great day when Columban converted Agilulf and received from the fiery King an old ruined church in Eborium, a stark devastated district. In the midst of bricks and sermons, building up his new monastery together with equally back-breaking mission work among the Lombards, the indefatigable Irish abbot found time to write a treatise — of all things, *against the Arians!* The Church in North Italy was torn with dissension over the "Three Chapters," writings said to favor Nestorianism. Pope Gregory tolerated the defenders of the work; not so Columban who always packed a stout cudgel. The abbot of Eborium (Bobbio) wrote an amazing letter to the Holy Father. "We Irish," he said, "though dwelling at the far ends of the earth, are all disciples of St. Peter and St. Paul.

## *Saint Columban and the Seventh Century*

Neither heretic, nor Jew, nor Schismatic has ever been among us; but the Catholic faith just as it was first delivered to us by yourselves, the successors of the Apostles, is held unchanged. We are bound to the Chair of Peter, and although Rome is great and renowned, through that Chair alone is she looked on as great and illustrious among us." . . . Later the aging abbot actually journeyed down the Apennines to Rome where he was graciously received by Gregory who gave him many relics.

Once back in Bobbio, there was much to be accomplished at home, in the cloister and afield among the semi-pagans in the district. Small bands went forth to combat the fraud of the Evil One by weeding out deep-lying vices of ignorance and superstition. These monks, instinct with the spirit of St. Patrick, toiled daily in the Lombard wastes, fortifying strange folk with the dew of virtue, the while their genius, winning temperament, childlike simplicity won the hearts of their hearers. Faith and love of God grew apace as the Church cast deeper roots in the daily lives of a tribe once regarded as the most terrible of all the barbarians. One is left wondering whether Columban amid the Lombards harked back to the Frankish days. Or was he aware of what had transpired in the interim? We do know that the old abbot in exile wrote from Tours to King Thierry that within three years he and his children would perish, a fearsome prophecy that actually came to pass. But far more dreadful was the end of the King's mother, Brunhild. She who had sowed the wind now reaped the whirlwind; the evil woman directly responsible for so many crimes received the reward of her misdeeds. The Burgundian and Austrasian nobles, having deserted the despot in time of danger, now proceeded to betray her. Hunted down like a tigress, Brunhild was captured, brought in chains to Reneve, and condemned to death. For three

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

long years the old Queen underwent torture, then they placed her on a camel and exhibited her to the ribald jest of camp-followers; after that, they put an end to her agony by binding the poor broken creature to a wild horse which dragged her to her death. The mangled remains deemed unholy, defiled, and unworthy of Christian burial, were burned outside the camp. Thus ended the strange career of this incredible woman who in her bleak day gave many alms, ransomed prisoners, even encouraged religion, yet for the forty years she ruled never ceased to plot, poison, and mercilessly murder her foes.

### *Last Days of the Abbot*

Yes, there were weird exits and mysterious entrances in the drama of Columban's stern and oft-threatened life. Cruel houndings, hateful cries, monasterial earthquakes, growling and glaring Franks, scenes of chaos which he could have summoned before the eyes of memory. On the other hand, what joys in service, what hopes for the future, what love and loyalty from the brethren in Christ. But time was flying fast, the lights of the world had grown dim, and the old abbot, loaded with the burdens of half a century, sank into the infirmities of old age. His once powerful body was now bowed and bloodless, but his face had lost none of its spiritual beauty. Used as he was to solitude, the monastery proved too comfortable, so again he took to the mountainside to spend his last days in a cave. Up there he could keep the Eternal Hills ever in mind and, as he looked down on his beloved Bobbio, his soul's eyes must have strained far beyond, through half a century to Annegrav and Luxeuil. Yes, farther still — across the seas to the beloved homeland, always lingering in memory, which he had left to follow Christ. Near his cave was an unfailing reminder of Ireland, the chapel dedicated to Our Lady — his life, his sweetness, his hope! Here

## *Saint Columban and the Seventh Century*

he spent many an hour, living as in a dream, in prayer for his soul's salvation, in entreaty for his cherished charges. Soon messengers arrived from the western world, from Segebert, King of the Franks, exhorting the Irish abbot to return to Luxeuil. His foes were dead, they assured him, and the old monks longed for his presence. Too late now — a more important herald was on the way, one for whom Columban had long prepared. A little after that came the summons, and the break of the eternal dawn. It was his day and his Lord's Day, the 23rd of November, in the year 615.

Back in Swabia, Gallus had a vision of the death of his old master. The monks had just finished Sunday Matins when the peace of the hour was stirred by a message from the abbot. They could scarcely believe their ears when the brother announced that Gallus wanted to offer the Holy Sacrifice! "After the night office," Gallus explained, "it was revealed to me that my master Columban had fallen asleep in the Lord!" Mass over, he straightway despatched a seasoned, courageous runner across the Alps. "Hasten to Italy, my son, to the monastery of Bobbio; find out all that has happened to my Father; mark the day and the hour of his death, and return without delay. Do not fear, God will guide your steps." The monk returned many days later with the news that the old abbot had died "at the same hour." He brought for Gallus Columban's *cambutt* (a staff) and a missive from the monks of Bobbio. "Before his death," it read, "our Master told us to send his staff to Gallus as a token of forgiveness." After that Gallus continued to govern his monks at Albon until, at the age of ninety-five, he followed his former leader, loyal to the last gasp. A church was erected on the old hermit site, *Ecclesia Sancti Galluni*, and about its precincts grew the great monastery of St. Gall. By the next century it had far-famed schools, the best library in Europe, and the ablest

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

teachers in Christendom. Brilliant scholars from the West braved the Alps to study arts, letters and science; while Irish and Anglo-Saxon monks journeyed across Europe to copy manuscript for their own libraries.

### *The Cross and the Crescent*

When Columban left Luxeuil the seeds had already been sown and had come to early flower upon the difficult soil of the Frankish Empire. The roots then were his roots, the invisible ultimate fibers were Celtic fibers. And as Luxeuil grew, its schools became famous throughout Europe for their piety and learning. By an irony of Heaven, the Gallic bishops, who had aided in the expulsion of Columban and his monks, had to give way to the pupils of those heroic exiles. New and better hands now grasped the helm and steered the ship so that Truth and Justice sailed on. Before mid-century the Church of Gaul proved the glory of Christendom; by and large her bishops were the most holy, the most distinguished for their learning and doctrine. There were great Episcopal schools at Paris, Lyons, Chartres, Bourges, Le Mans, Vienne Chalons, Ulrech, Maestrich, Trier. So highly esteemed was the Gallic episcopacy in this dark century of ignorance and barbarism that the Pope begged King Segebert to send some of his bishops to Rome that they might go forth from the Eternal City as missionaries to the decadent Eastern Church. Let the barbarian rage, Luxeuil continued doing Columban's good work; St. Gall, too, whose monks were the pride of Swabia. Gallus himself twice refused the bishopric of Constance as well as the abbatial dignity of Luxeuil, proffered him after the death of Eustace, Columban's successor. His own place later expanded into a great center, ruled over by St. Otmar whom Charles Martel appointed to guard the relics of the saintly pioneer. And as to Bobbio, Columban's last

## *Saint Columban and the Seventh Century*

foundation proved a mighty stronghold against the Arians; the monks lived in peace among books which their great abbot had brought from Ireland and treatises he himself had composed; nor was it long before their library became the most celebrated in all Italy. Well for the Church that she had such tireless scholars and missionaries because further changes were in store; new foes, more savage than the old, were now on their way to attack and destroy her.

Islamism stood at the gateway of the West, daring to match her bloody scimitar against the Sword of the Spirit. In far-off Arabia the wrath of the infidel had gathered and spread. Its dread inspirer, Mohammed, born in 570, was an Arab fanatic, an epileptic and visionary, who claimed he had a "revelation" from St. Gabriel. Yet this wild-eyed reformer was himself a crafty time-serving sensualist who fell in love with Zeid's beautiful wife, made her his own, then enacted that any man who would might divorce his wife. When Mohammed entered upon his mission to cleanse his land of bestial behavior and gross idolatry, the Arab tribes rose up against him, compelling the self-styled prophet to flee to Medina for his life. The date of his flight (hegira) in 622 marks the beginning of the Mohammedan calendar, just as A.D.I, is the start of the Christian calendar. In 630 he returned to Mecca in triumph and died three years later, after succeeding in substituting Theism for polytheism, and a higher morality for a lower. No more than that did he achieve, for Islamism was nothing but Judaism adapted to Arabia. Mohammed at first had not contemplated anything like foreign conquest, though he did instil into the Arab mind that their religion was a fighting faith, to be propagated by the sword. His followers set about doing just that in their wild frenzy of conquest; theirs was "the cold doctrine, the cutting steel, and the destroying flame." For Mohammed

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

revealed himself an apostle of lust, violence and bloodshed while the Arabs' faith held that death in battle was the open door to eternal happiness. The East, sunk into the dry-rot of heresy, schism and corruption, proved easy prey to these fierce desert-people, doom-sent fanatics intent on blotting out the Church of Christ. By 637 Arab armies had conquered Damascus and Jerusalem; they overran Africa, then Persia shared the fate of Syria and Africa. Before the seventh century ended, the Moslem's crescent had half-ringed an imperilled Christendom. There was nothing in all history like this Brown Death which shortly, in 711, spread to Spain, even crossing the Pyrenees before it was halted. As one views the awful scene, a great truth stands out above all the din of battle. The Moslem onslaught failed before the counter-attacks of the tribes united after century-long labor by the monks of the West. Except for the Benedicts, Gregorys, Columbans, St. Gallus, Bonifaces and their countless spiritual sons, Europe would have succumbed to Mohammedanism. Evidently "the gates of hell shall never prevail . . ."

# Saint Boniface

TAMER OF TRIBES

# SAINT BONIFACE AND THE EIGHTH CENTURY

<i>Emperors (Eastern)</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
JUSTINIAN II, 705-711	Arts and Letters in Britain 700	ST. SERGIUS I, 687-701
	Boniface (Winifred) young Benedictine 700	
	Islam rules North Africa 700	JOHN VI, 701-705 JOHN VII, 705-707
	Eastern Empire sunk in corruption 700	
	Merovingian's dynasty in decay 700	
PHILIPPICUS, 711-713 ANASTASIUS II, 713-716	Boniface at Nuthsalling monastery 705	SISSINNIUS, 708 CONSTANTINE, 708-715
	Aldhelm of Malmesbury, O.S.B., dies 709	
	Boniface ordained to the priesthood 710	
LEO THE ISAUARIAN, 717-741	Islam enters Spain 711	ST. GREGORY II, 715-731
	Boniface preaches to Frisians 716	
	Triple Threat — Islam Lombard, Image Breakers 716	
	Leo resists Moslems at Constantinople 717	
	Boniface's first visit to Rome 718	
CONSTANTINE III, 741-775	Boniface at work east of Rhine 719	ST. GREGORY III, 731-741
	Boniface, a Bishop, sent to Hessa 722	
	Leo issues proclamation against images 726	
	Gregory II excommunicates Emperor 730	
	Charles, Hammerer, stems Mohammedan tide 732	
	Death of Venerable Bede of Yarrow 735	ST. ZACHARY, 741-752
	Willibrord assists Boniface 737	
	Boniface visits Rome 738	
	Lombards again in arms 739	
	Charles the Hammerer dies 741	
	Union of Church and Franks under Pope Zachary 741	ST. STEPHEN II, 752-757
	Carloman succeeds Charles 741	
	First German Council 742	
	Boniface, Archbishop of Austrasia 743	
	Carloman enters a monastery 747	
LEO IV, 775-780	Boniface, Primate of Germany 748	ST. PAUL I, 757-767
	Boniface anoints and crowns Pepin King 751	
	Boniface labors East of Zuyder Zee 753	ST. STEPHEN III, 768
	Pope Stephen visits Pepin 754	
	Boniface martyred by Frisians 755	ADRIAN I, 772-795
	Charlemagne succeeds Pepin 768	
	Lombards again aggressive 769	LEO III, 795-816
	Pope Adrian I secures order 772	
	Lombardy annexed by Franks 774	
	Alcuin heads Charlemagne's School 782	
CONSTANTINE IV, 780-797	Norsemen reach Iceland for settlement 784	
	Second Council of Nice 787	
	Charles the Great conquers Avars 794	
	Avar tribes offer submission 795	
	Leo III crowns Charlemagne 800	

## SAINT BONIFACE AND THE EIGHTH CENTURY

### *Light over Britain*

The seventh century in the north was a time of sowing in tears, the eighth a veritable harvest for the faith and letters. Irish monks left their holy land to plant the gospel seed in Britain; Iona, founded in 563 by Columba, Eire's first exile, did glorious service as a great mission-center for Scotland and north England. The light spread when Augustine reached Kent in 596 with his forty monks who girded themselves to preach in the highways and byways; the Roman Paulinus baptized King Edwin of Northumbria, in 627; and a metropolitan see arose in the old Roman city of York. Less than a decade later, Aidan, pupil of Columba, founded the far-famed Lindesfarne, one of whose famous sons Wilfred became Archbishop of Canterbury and for many years guided the English Church through crisis after crisis! Four great Benedictines stand out in these early days — Benedict Biscop (628–690), a veritable patriarch of monks, who introduced the Roman rite in place of the Celtic usages in the north of England; Wilfred (634), who established there the rule of the black monks; Aldhelm (709), the first to cultivate classical learning with success; and Venerable Bede (672–735), unquestionably the most notable scholar of the age. Soon many Anglo-Saxon monks made their way to Gaul, even as far as Rome, bringing back skilled architects, craftsmen and musicians, enriching the abbeys — Ripon, Hexham, Wearmouth, Jarrow — with books, pictures, vestments. By mid-century, Britain possessed arts and letters in a singular degree, a culture clearly traceable to two sources — Irish monasticism and Benedictine tradition. A system of educa-

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

tion flourished in monastic schools where classical poetry, church history, canon law and the councils held high place; in the nunneries serious studies were pursued along with music, writing, calligraphy and the making of vestments. So great was the growth of religious houses that Venerable Bede himself frankly regarded it excessive and weakening to the military resources of the state. "On the material side," a competent historian concludes, "Anglo-Saxon civilization was a failure; its chief industry seems to have been the manufacture and export of saints."

But those same saints, as history bears out, proved to be the actual makers of a new Europe by evangelizing Scandinavia, Belgium and Germany in the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries. One of them deserves particular attention because he was not only scholar and statesman, but far and away the most illustrious missionary of this century. His name? Boniface of Crediton, the most complete of Christian Englishmen, born about 675 of Anglo-Saxon parents in Devonshire. The preparation and fulfilment of this great Benedictine's pioneer task can best be seen against the background of the eighth century, during which he entered the field afar and achieved prodigious results. His life and works in that troubled war-torn world whose course he was to affect so deeply, reveal him as a paragon in sheer common sense, gravity, restraint, persistence, and stubbornness in the right. As a boy Boniface came under the influence of the black monks who visited his home, nor was it long before he had decided on the religious life. At Exeter, under Abbot Wolfhard, he studied history, rhetoric, grammar and poetry, besides the Sacred Scriptures. And as he grew older he strove harder to live up to the model of a missionary, imprinted on his receptive soul. A true person always, Boniface had the quality of spiritual awareness, wisely viewing events

## *Saint Boniface and the Eighth Century*

in the light of God, and resolved to deal with men and things from a gospel outlook. After a stern novitiate at Notshalling, the budding scholar was put in charge of the monastic school where his reputation gave high promise of civil and ecclesiastical preferment. For such things, however, this Anglo-Saxon master had little use, preferring to follow the Way and the Truth through lands white for the harvest. No stay-at-home monk was Boniface, with a do-nothing attitude towards the far-away missions, but the kind of apostle in the making that yearned hourly to win souls. Deep in his heart was the burning desire to bring the gospel word to his benighted kindred, the old Saxons in Germany. What a joy forever when the patient monk received word that the abbot had granted his oft-repeated request to go forth and teach. He left the dais, quit the classroom and proceeded with modest gallantry to face the dark land that lay beyond Britain.

### *Mission to the South*

The lands about the North Sea and the Baltic were pagan-bound in darkness. Even in Friesland, scene of Boniface's first essay, where his own brethren had earlier preached, the inhabitants had lost the faith to such an extent that political conditions compelled the young missionary to return to Britain. That homecoming must have been agonizing for one whose heart was so set on poor pagans, and when they sought to elect him abbot the honor was firmly declined. Two years later he was on the road once more, this time Romeward bent, for he was determined to receive from the Pope the necessary faculties for his evangelical work. It is interesting to note that Boniface journeyed to the City of the Popes armed with an open letter of recommendation to various priests, princes, abbots and bishops en route, and best of all, a private letter

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

to Gregory II. One can picture that meeting of the missionary and the greatest Pope of the century. Big men both of them undoubtedly were, great too in their ideals, in their plans, in their might of soul. No doubt the Anglo-Saxon monk found much in common with the Italian Pope who, like himself, had received an excellent education in the arts and sciences besides attending the Schola Cantorum founded by St. Benedict. In these war-ridden days the Pope had to face perils on every side: North of him lay the restless Lombard menace; east, the image-breakers on the rampage; south and west the Moslem hordes. For the present the Lombard and Byzantine could bear watching! Gregory, as Secretary to Pope Sergius on his visit to Constantinople, had indelible impressions of the Byzantine, and he knew the Lombard plotters equally well. Boniface, too, passing through, had sensed the northern danger; they were tricky these Longbeards, forever coveting the Exarch's lands about Ravenna. Did Leo, the Isaurian, claim jurisdiction over the West? Let him try to impose it on their new barbarian kingdom and he would find to his grief how little authority he really possessed. The Eastern Emperor was attempting to banish all images from Christian churches, but so fierce a tumult was raised by the people that the tricky Byzantine backed down, declaring ignominiously, "I do not design that the images be altogether removed but I order them to be placed in a more elevated situation that they may not be kissed, and thus be treated with disrespect while they are worthy of honor." Added to these papal trials, the Moslems were dangerously near, their pirate-crews infesting the Mediterranean and threatening every ship that rounded Italian shores.

Plainly there was work to be done, come Byzantine, come Lombard, come Saracen! So Gregory II gave Boniface full authority to evangelize the Germans east of the Rhine, but

## *Saint Boniface and the Eighth Century*

the Benedictine must first look over the ground, then return with his band and keep in touch with the Holy See. Thither Boniface proceeded; he found the Bavarian Church in a flourishing condition, similarly Alemannia, but Thuringia, though regarded by Rome as a Christian district, proved to be anything but Catholic, despite the heroic labors of St. Kilian (686-689). The Thuringians, reverting to their barbaric ways, had murdered many of Kilian's converts, and zealous priests faced difficult times with the pagans on every side. So the Pope's envoy spent some time preaching and converting multitudes in Thuringia as he also did in Hessa where centers were opened for the education of native clergy. On his way to the court of Charles Martel, Boniface planned to lay the whole matter before the Frankish ruler with a view to securing help and encouragement for the great missionary endeavor the Pope had authorized. But Charles' attitude proved dubious; the hard-bitten warrior was suspicious and mistrustful of ecclesiastical interference. It was the old, old conflict, the temporal ever prone to control the spiritual, the State asserting itself against the Church. About this time Boniface sent a letter to the Pope describing affairs east and west of the Rhine. The Pope in reply urged him to come to Rome, where he consecrated the monk a *regional bishop* with authority over Thuringia and Hessa. In addition Gregory enlisted the support of Charles whose prowess was known and feared by the heathen.

### *East of the Rhine*

On his own now and vested with authority, the newly-made bishop plodded his faithful unwearying way back to the wilderness. In Thuringia and Hessa, the heart of Germany, he had to slog through deep marshes, breast the almost impenetrable underbrush, brave it through dark timberlands.

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

The day's work done — a day of preaching and baptizing — his chair was a stone on the hard earth, his table a windfall, his wash-basin a running brook. He devoted himself to the tribes he encountered for there were no cities in these wild parts, and the natives dwelt in forest and on hillside. They were difficult, these Teuton savages and slow to learn the new way of life. Brave, fierce in battle, loyal to the cause, in times of peace they were wont to lie about idle, lazy as their dogs; they drank excessively of barley beer and gambled madly like thieves. Their young men, sworn to battle service, stood by their chiefs to the last ditch, boasting their bravery, disporting themselves in sword dances among up-turned blades. Their women, young and old, were regarded as chattels; marriage contracts proved mere sales — *weib* in their language as in their thought was neutral; when a young maiden put up her flowing hair into a braid or knot that meant she was now in complete subjection to her sottish carousing master. One can only guess what suffering Boniface experienced sharing the Teuton customs that did not conflict with the Christian way. But think of the flaming faith and selfless devotion, the courage and hardihood required to sow the gospel seed among those warriors. Yet, so great was the power and sway of this man of God that he converted tribe after tribe, a stupendous task when one further considers the energy and understanding it must have demanded.

It was in Hessia, however, that Boniface found the going most difficult. Many converts had disappeared during his absence, returning to the swamps there to practice pagan rites. An ancient oak, he learned, sacred to the name of Thor, the god of thunder, proved the greatest obstacle to the missionaries. In spite of every appeal, the people continued to hold the god-inhabited tree in awe, and to gather about it, so the bishop decided to settle the matter once for all. Only sheer

### *Saint Boniface and the Eighth Century*

nerve and the power of grace could have held him up in such a crisis. Would he be downed, would he give up? Not while he was alive. He journeyed through the underbrush and made his way into the primeval forest, determined to show the pagans how utterly powerless was their vaunted one. And when he reached the unholy place, axe in hand, Boniface led his monks, jostling the crowd. To the amazement of all he started to cut down the sacred oak. The Teutons waited, tense, expectant, thoroughly frightened, for they expected to see the fearless blasphemer annihilated on the spot. To tell the truth, it was beyond their bounds of belief that such an act could go unpunished by Thor. But nothing happened, except that they saw for themselves a man who had no fear of their great god, and who never knew when he was beaten. One can see how the path of gospel preaching was easy after that. Out of the hewn timber of Thor's oak Boniface constructed a chapel which he dedicated to St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles. After that he built a church on the banks of the Werra, destroyed another idol at Eschwego, and then retraced his steps to Thuringia. Such valiant effort, followed by organized missionary action, began to bear rich fruit. Abbeys rose on once bloody sites — Buraburg, Ammonaburg, Fulda. New dioceses appeared in the heart of pagan districts. And with the coming of Anglo-Saxon nuns the schools, opened for young Teutons, provided more of the light and truth that would make Germany a living member of European society.

### *Triple Threat to the Papacy*

On the death of his able protector, Gregory II, Boniface wrote the new Pope, Gregory III, a Syrian, asking for more help, since the field had become almost limitless. The new

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

pontiff, inheriting the woes of his predecessor, would presently take care of Boniface's problem — but not yet. For while Boniface was winning Germany, the papacy found itself in bad straits. In the East Leo the Isaurian, instead of joining with Rome to secure a better world, let his Byzantine trickery have full play. Gregory II had had his troubles with this overreaching Emperor who, under Jewish-Moslem influence, had issued an edict against images, followed by an order to demolish the statues of Christ and burn the images of Mary and the Saints. The patriarch of Constantinople, Germanus, protested in vain, then the people arose in such fury that the Emperor was cowed for the time being. But the wily schemer had his revenge: he eventually liquidated the aged, intrepid Patriarch, and in 726 burned the great library of the Imperial College — the rector and twelve professors met their death in the flames which consumed 303,000 valuable volumes. And when Leo ordered the statue of Christ to be removed from the Brazen Gate of Constantinople, the people threw the imperial agent from the ladder and slew the officers, only to be put to the sword in the riot that ensued. Leo's next move was to urge Gregory II to call a council: "You have asked," the Pope replied, "that a general council be called; such a thing seems to us to be useless. You are a persecutor of images, a contumelious enemy and a destroyer; cease and give us your silence! While the churches of God are in peace, you fight and raise hatred and scandal. Stop this and be quiet; then there will be no need of a synod." In answer, the Emperor sent emissaries to Rome with an order to kidnap the Pope and destroy the statue of Peter. "If you send troops for the destruction of the statue of St. Peter," Gregory II warned, "look to it! If you insult us, and conspire against us . . . the Roman Pontiff will go out into the Campagna, and

### *Saint Boniface and the Eighth Century*

you may then come and strike the winds!" A synod was held in 730, not in the East but in Rome, where the image-breakers were condemned, and Leo, the Isaurian, excommunicated. The rift thus widened between Rome and the East, not far off now from a final break. Pope Gregory II died that same year and Gregory III found himself in the midst of the battle for rights both human and divine.

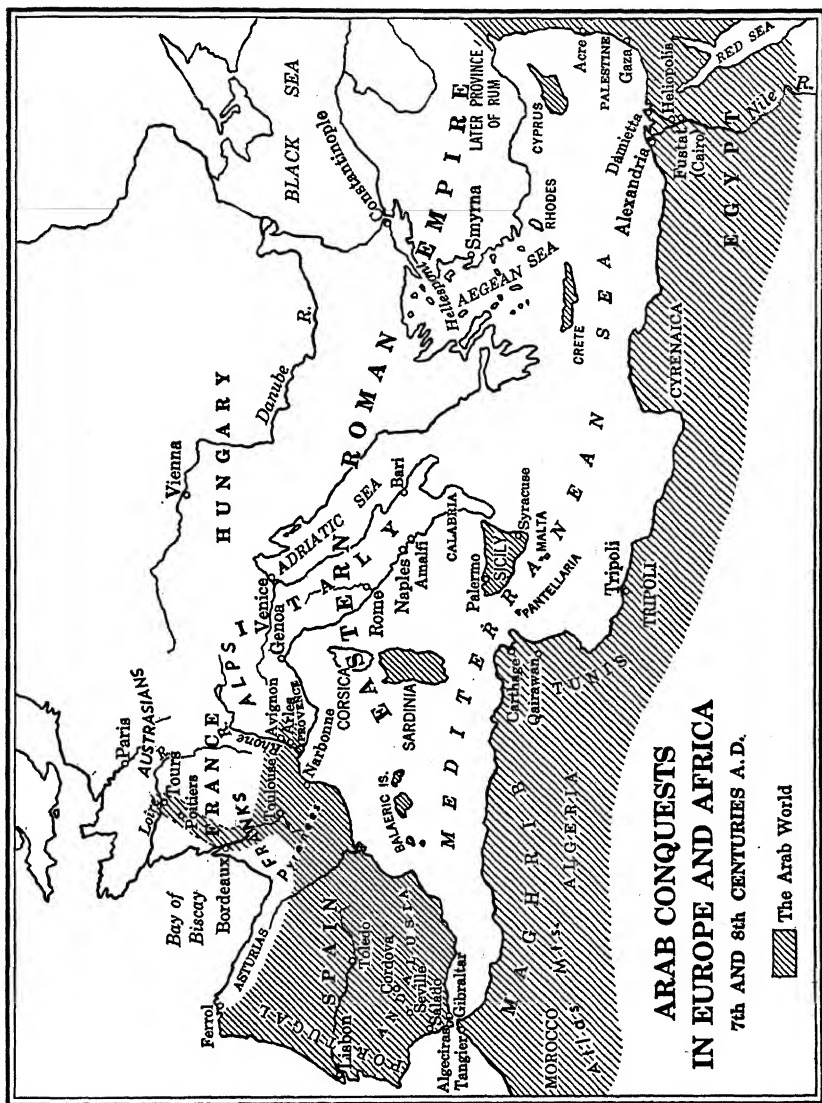
The Lombards as usual proved the new Pope's second threat. From the first day they entered Italy these master rogues and land-thieves had been a heart-ache for the papacy. Even after they embraced Christianity the old fighting spirit ran strong in their blood. When Gregory II was at odds with Leo over the image-breaking, they saw their chance to create fresh trouble; slyly they made for Ravenna and captured the seemingly impregnable fortress. The blundering Emperor was defeated on another occasion when he tried to hatch a plot with Luitprand to humble Gregory II; the Lombard was to support the Exarch, who in turn would hand two dukes into his power. But the base scheme fell through, for Luitprand, much as he hated the power of Rome, would not betray this great Pope whose charity, patience, tolerance and magnetic personality he admired. None the less it was necessary for every shepherd to look ahead, so Gregory III set about building the fortifications of the Eternal City, never knowing when the foes to the north might rise in arms. As a matter of fact, they did, in 739, the eighth year of his pontificate. The Pope, however, sensing the impending danger, had recourse to the help of the Franks and wisely sent to Charles Martel the keys of the tomb of the apostles, apprising that rough-and-ready Frank of the danger from the north and east as well. Yes, both Lombards and image-breakers were treacherous foes, yet they were as naught compared to a

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

menace terrible and threatening not only to Italy but to all Christendom.

### *Zero Hour in the West*

Far worse than the jaws of the Lombard-Byzantine pincers was the plague of Islam. And no wonder when those fiery sons of the desert, sworn to violence and bloodshed, continued their steady advance with swinging scimitar, conquering everything in their way. Across the Strait of Gibraltar they swept, through Spain and Aquitaine, well into Gaul; and everywhere they left ruin and horror. In Spain, an easy victim because of domestic dissensions, only a few northern fastnesses still held out, manned as they were by valiant Christian Visigoths. But could the Christian West stand unbowed as did those few brave die-hards? The Mediterranean Sea had become a Saracen lake, and eerie dread hung like a nightmare over Rome, indeed over all Italy which seethed with stories of invasion. Out at sea merchantmen, sighting the crescent of Moslem pirates, fled helter-skelter to ports of safety. In every Christian abode rumor had it that the fanatical tribesmen of Arabia had terrorized the Jews into apostacy — one Jewish tribe having sworn allegiance to Islam recanted only to have their fighting-men put to the sword while their women and children became slaves to the victors. Leo, the Isaurian, had succeeded, it is true, in driving them away from Constantinople in 717, but their balesome influence continued to corrupt the Eastern Church. God forbid that they ever rule the West, as they now imperilled; unless driven off and very soon they would presently be sailing up the Tiber and the Mother of Civilization would be subjected to unspeakable cruelties. The war-cloud imperilled the Frankish Empire, too, and the tell-tale glint of the Arab sword could be seen on the blood-red horizon. The fact



## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

is that the Moslem forces, having gained a foothold in Gaul, were heading for Tours and shortly, on land as on the sea, would be at the gates of Italy. Nobody knew better than Pope Gregory that the one earthly power that could keep the Moslem at bay was the Franks. Naturally, then, with Rome in the line of their sweep, the pontiff appealed to Charles Martel who had done such yeoman service for the Church against the Lombards. No one else, humanly speaking, could defend Rome and, defending Rome, save Europe from the war criminals who by now had half-circled Christendom. And yet the Ruler of the Nations Who holds in His Hands the thread of all human relations had promised that the Rock of Peter would never be totally submerged.

The hard-won civilization of the whole West lay in the balance when the violent and scowling Charles summoned his Austrasians to the fray. Let the Mohammedans come, his men would see to it that their doom was fixed, for the Franks loved nothing better than the edge of war. With incredible speed Charles maneuvered the strife-hungry army into a mighty wall of iron to intercept the invader. A fierce battle was joined which lasted seven days. At the first stroke of the Moslem attack scimitar crossed with sword in a life-and-death struggle. But the Gallic warriors had only begun; time and again they fought back, carrying the combat to the enemy. They engaged the Mohammedan in the cruelest fashion, their terrific assaults threw his ranks into complete confusion. It mattered little that the desperate leaders tried to rally their exhausted fanatics with "Fight, fight — Paradise, Paradise!" The unconquerable Franks charged and charged again, battling to the bitter end — no truce, no quarter, war to the death! On the seventh day the tide turned against the invader, whose forces, mowed down by the Franks, fell into frenzied disorder. The Moslem advance

## *Saint Boniface and the Eighth Century*

guard collapsed completely; their columns mangled as never before, turned and fled. All roads to Provence were jammed with heathen stragglers nursing their wounds; later they dragged their weary way over the Pyrenees. Never again did they attempt to cross swords with the Christian armies of the West, for they knew, and their children's children knew, that they had met more than their match. The far-reaching effect of Charles' victory can scarcely be estimated, and after this epochal battle the war-bent King was known as *Martel*, the Hammer, while his fighting Franks commanded the respect, not to say fear, of their neighbors on every side.

### *Post-war Days*

Charles, the Hammer, now rode high in the saddle, master of all he surveyed. The indomitable soldier, having little conception of the service of the Church, regarded her growing power as an encroachment. So when Boniface pled with him for permission to hold a synod, Charles refused, though it was sorely needed in that post-war day. The King of the Franks ran things with a free hand and made no bones about rewarding his nobles with large estates of the Church, giving away abbeys, even bishoprics to his friends. Of this age of spoliation the great missionary wrote to Pope Zachary, "Religion is trodden underfoot. Benefices are given to greedy laymen or unchaste and public clerics. All their crimes do not prevent their attaining the priesthood . . . many of them are drunkards given up to the chase and soldiers who do not shrink from shedding Christian blood." No wonder the influence of the Pope and his zealous supporters lost ground; indeed nothing could be more imperative than the restoration of legitimate authority, and the regulation of relations between bishops and their clergy. The Frankish princes had their court chaplains, the nobles their castle chaplains, all of them

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

prone to set little store by the legislation of the bishops. There was decline of intelligence and character in the priesthood, what with the lower clergy recruited from bondsmen and opportunities of real education rare. Many ignorant aspirants, unable even to read a Latin homily or preach effectively in the vulgar tongue, got themselves ordained only to go about foot-loose making money by exercising their spiritual functions. The parish church became neglected, attended only by the poor, dioceses grew unwieldy and in many places unmanageable. Add to all this the pitiful condition of the masses, ground under the heel of small-time tyrants; and remember, this was the seed-time of feudalism — the system by which property (feud = trust land) was parcelled out to petty lords by way of fee for services rendered. These parcels of land were worked by poor serfs, ruled by the will of an owner who took an oath of fidelity to a higher up. One can see how easily the exploited masses succumbed to every sort of credulity and superstition while their callous masters let them sink lower into the cruelest servitude.

### *Sword of the Spirit*

Charles, the Hammer, died the same year as Pope Gregory III and was succeeded by his sons Carloman and Pepin. By good chance Boniface, meeting Carloman, received an invitation to a conference with his former pupil. The energetic Bishop, as was his wont, added persistence to persuasiveness with his royal host who had always admired the stalwart character of his teacher. The result? Boniface sent word to Pope Zachary that the truly Catholic King greatly desired a synod. Evidently Carloman the Frank had something quite alien to his forebears — humility and renunciation, for later on in 747 he gave up his throne to Pepin and entered a monastery. Once the long-desired opportunity of reform

## *Saint Boniface and the Eighth Century*

presented itself, Boniface lost no time improving it. A synod was held, the first in Germany, laws were enacted for the clergy and the Benedictine rule became the norm for religious. Other synods followed, empowered by the authority of Carloman, and heartened by the zeal of Boniface who wielded "the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, and the Word of God is more piercing than a two-edged sword." The Church, as the missionary held, must forever witness to the Word — for the Word is not only a judgment but a creative force which bears fruit when man co-operates with faith and spiritual obedi  nce. By degrees the Franks learned that truth, nor was it long before the supremacy of the Vicar of Christ and the missionary of the bishops became widely accepted. In 748 Pope Zachary made the old missionary Primate of Germany and Archbishop of Mainz, so when Boniface and Pepin met to confer for the common good, the two were quickly sure of each other, equally aware of the spiritual power and regal sway that hung in the balance. Under the new order Boniface continued to enforce laws forbidding the clergy to hunt, shoot, or carry arms, but he was not successful in establishing appeals for local bishops to the Holy See, or in securing the right of the Pope in the investiture of Frankish bishops. The fact is that Pepin, though willing to help the reform, did not want to relinquish his control of the Frankish Church. None the less the change towards better unity came when Pepin obtained from Rome the authority to set aside the old royal house. Never satisfied with merely ruling the Franks, he coveted the crown of sovereignty still worn by the petty degenerate Merovingians. On a November day in 751 he gained his heart's desire when Boniface, authorized by Pope Zachary, anointed him King of the Franks, using the solemn rites followed in Anglo-Saxon England and Visigoth Spain. Pepin's political cup full to

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the brim, the Carolingian house flourished exceedingly, and the Frankish monarch proudly championed and protected the Holy See. A few years later, in 754, Pope Zachary's successor, Stephen II, paid a visit to Pepin, during which the King guaranteed to the Church all the former Byzantine possessions in Italy, and in return received the dignity of Patriarch of the Romans.

As his years lengthened Boniface realized more than ever what heavy tasks lay ahead in the west as well as east of the Rhine. Aided and abetted by Pepin, he extended the cause of Christ, and a better Gaul appeared as religion grew apace in civil life with peace and unity. The missionaries sent from England at his request — Lull, Burchard, Witta, Willabald, Wunibald, Thecla and others — showed themselves whole-souled apostles. The heart of their chief was still aflame with dreams of German faith, and ever would be, to the very last. To lend a feeble hand to the great work, he visited his monks regularly, stayed in their monasteries, rejoiced exceedingly in the progress of the Kingdom. Fulda was very dear to him; under Sturm, his devoted follower, this once far-off oasis in the wildest of regions had become both a home of letters and a center of religious life for the whole district. Every year the tireless shepherd made it his business to go there, spend the time in prayer and supervise the training of the sons of St. Benedict. But as the burden of work became heavier, in 752 he resigned the Archbishopric of Mainz and turned over the work to Abbot Lull. It racked his old heart to think that the Frisians, his Saxon kinsmen, still dwelt in pagan darkness, and the yearning to carry on among them never ceased. In vain did the Abbot of Utrecht urge him to accept the honored post and end his days in Benedictine quiet.

The next year the old apostle, now nearing eighty, set out for Zuyder Zee, the scene of his first mission. No

### *Saint Boniface and the Eighth Century*

sooner had he reached the east coast than the grim fact of hostile foes faced him once more, yet he labored as usual day after day, instructing, baptizing, fortifying new converts in the faith. Only once he returned — and for the last time — to see his monks, then back to fresh work for souls. One day in 754 when gathering his converts for Confirmation the pagans on the river Borne fell upon the little party and put them to the sword. The last hour had struck for Boniface and his fifty-two companions, and when the sun set, it left the trampled riverbank soaked with the blood of the martyrs. No sooner had the scattered Christians returned to the scene than they found the body of their beloved Boniface; beside him lay a gory copy of St. Ambrose's great treatise, "*The Advantage of Death*." They bore the gashed body to Utrecht, later it reposed in Mainz, and finally found its resting place in Fulda. It was all as he had wished it to be; even to the last resting place where so long his living heart beat with love, the heart of a saint "who had deeper influence on the history of Europe than any Englishman who ever lived."<sup>1</sup>

### *The Empire Builder*

The great work, begun by Boniface and Pepin, found its fulfilment by the end of the century. For Boniface brought about the Frankish alliance with the Church besides uniting Teutonic initiative with Latin order. And it was Pepin's son, Charles the Great, who reorganized Christendom by forging still stronger ties between the monarchy and the Church. The sole ruler of the Franks — just under thirty, over six feet in height, with yellow flowing hair — Charles proved in a very real sense the greatest empire builder of them all. His inherited instinct to extend the Frankish power and break up all opposition soon manifested itself. He was forever looking forward to extending his domains,

<sup>1</sup>Dawson, Chris., *The Making of Europe*, pp. 210-211.

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

following a policy that was as broad as it was idealistic, a policy which, as we shall see, would win for him a far-flung empire to the Elbe, the Mediterranean and the lower Danube. Let us then attempt to follow the roads to victory in the course of Charles' empire. No sooner had Pope Adrian I run afoul of the Lombards than he called upon the new Frankish King for help. Charles, rallying his armies, crossed the Alps, overturned the Lombard monarchy and established the Frankish rule in its place. Then he marched to Rome to meet the Pontiff, arriving there on Easter Sunday, 774. The two met and embraced. Adrian led the King to the tomb of the apostles, hand in hand they walked up the nave. That same week Charles agreed to great territorial concessions — the famous donation of Charlemagne, still disputed by historians. Upon leaving the Eternal City Charles' fighting Franks made short work of Pavia, after which he was crowned King of Lombardy. From there he went on to the Rhine and did battle with the Saxons; the risk was great, the cost high, and the contest was to last for thirty-two years. Next the conqueror, having mopped up the Moslem remnants in South Gaul, proceeded to Spain where the Moors were in full power. In 778, he crossed the Pyrenees on a conquering march that ended in the famous battle of Roncesvalles. On his return over the mountains, Basques attacked his rearguard, and drove them back into Gaul. So restless and feverish was the energy of this empire builder that in 791 he set out to subdue the strange pagan people that dwelt in present Hungary, between the Danube and the Carpathians — they were a predatory nation living in stockade-rimmed settlements which served them for towns. Charles' chronicler gives as reasons for this conquest, the two years' layoff from war, the malice of the Avars towards the Church, and their failure to make amends for the raids and thefts committed in

### *Saint Boniface and the Eighth Century*

Frankish territories. In 795 a few Avar tribes offered submission by sending one of their princes as hostage; he was baptized and returned to his people to effect their conversion.

Leo III, who had ascended the papal throne in 795, now took steps which were to have enormous bearing on the future of Europe. Too long had Rome been the target of Lombard attack, and Italy the bloody prey of Byzantine plotters. Losing no time, he sent Charles the keys of the tomb of St. Peter and the banner of the City of Rome, tokens of political submission. "It is ours," said the King of the Franks in a return missive, "externally to defend the Church, and internally to fortify it by acknowledging the Catholic Faith; it is yours to pray for the victory of Christendom and the magnifying of the name of Christ." But shortly after that Leo fell upon hard days; in 799 during a procession he was attacked by angry nobles who interned the wounded, half-blinded pontiff in a monastery. He escaped, however, going to St. Peter's where his eyesight was miraculously restored. Then, to secure aid, he fled over the Alps and appealed in person to the King at Paderborn. The next year when Charles was in Ravenna, planning to march down to Rome, Leo prepared a regal reception for the foremost ruler in Christendom. Day after day the distinguished visitor could be seen about Rome, in the patrician court dress, tunic, cloak and shoes. The Frankish blue, silver and sable and the Gothic boots had been laid aside. The great climax of his visit came on Christmas day, 800, when the people were assembled at Mass, and Charles among them, before the Shrine of St. Peter. During the service the Pope, acting as a representative of his people, left his chair and approached the kneeling King. And when he placed over his shoulders the purple robe of empire, and laid a golden crown on his head, the congregation shouted their consent. The Romans

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

had again chosen for themselves an Emperor! As the chronicler puts it, "When the people had made an end of chanting the *Laudes* he was adored by the Pope after the manner of the emperors of old." The Roman Empire, remember, though for three hundred years but a name, had a powerful influence on the minds of millions who deemed it a counterpart of the Catholic Church. Now they regarded the Kingdom of God and the Empire as one, with two branches, two co-ordinate powers, the spiritual and the temporal; and from that day on Charles, crowned by the Pope, possessed new dignity and added responsibility. At long last the Holy Roman Empire was inaugurated; an ideal, of course, after which future ages were to strive, yet a great reality also that lasted centuries and made for papal security, peace and progress.

# Saint Ansgar

APOSTLE OF THE VIKINGS

# SAINT ANSGAR AND THE NINTH CENTURY

<i>Rulers in West</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
CHARLEMAGNE, 800-814	Charlemagne crowned Emperor by Pope Leo 800 Controversy on Nature of Christ 800 Ansgar, the Frank, born in Picardy 801 Pope Leo III visits Charlemagne 804 Ansgar in Cloister-School 806 Iona sacked by the Vikings 806 Darkest of Ages 814	LEO III, 795-816
LOUIS I (Pious), 814-840	Louis I reorganized Benedictine Rule 817 Louis restores episcopal rights 822 Ansgar becomes a Benedictine 822	ST. STEPHEN IV, 816-817 ST. PASCHAL I, 817-824 EUGENE II, 824-827
	Concilium Romanum 826 Ansgar preaches to the Danes 826	
	Ansgar visits Sweden 829 Ansgar made Bishop of Hamburg 831 Controversy about the Eucharist 831 Viking State in Ireland 832 Treaty of Verdun 843	VALENTINE, 827 GREGORY IV, 827-844
LOTHAIR, 840-869 (Middle Kingdom)	Bishop Gausbert driven out of Sweden 844 Eric of Jutland destroys Hamburg 845 Saracens ravage Tomb of the Apostles 846 Controversy about Predestination 847 Saracens routed at Ostia 849 Ansgar builds first Church in Schleswig 850 Ansgar revisits Vikings in Maelarsee 853	SERGIUS II, 844-847 ST. LEO IV, 847-855
LOUIS THE GERMAN, 841-911	Ansgar founds first Church in Denmark 860 Greek Schism 863 Death of Ansgar 865 Bulgarians visit Rome 866 Cyril and Methodius evangelize Moravians 868 Eighth General Council of Constantinople 869 King Alfred born in England 871 Harold (Viking) rules clans in Norway 872 Pope John VIII defeats Saracens 872 Rome refuses to recognize Photius 877	BENEDICT III, 855-858 ST. NICHOLAS THE GREAT, 858-867
CHARLES THE BALD, 875-887	King Alfred drives off the Danes 878	ADRIAN II, 867-872
LOUIS THE STAMMERER, 875-879	Paris saved from the Vikings 885	JOHN VIII, 872-882
CHARLES THE FAT, 879-887	Charles the Fat deposed 887	MARINUS I, 882-884 ADRIAN III, 884-885 BONIFACE VI, 885 STEPHEN V, 885-891
ARNULPH, 896	Olaf of Sweden furthers the Gospel 893 Death of Photius 898 Norse pirates sail the seas 899	FORMOSUS, 891-896 STEPHEN VI, 896-897 ROMANUS, 897-898 THEODORE II, 898 JOHN IX, 898 BENEDICT IV, 899

## SAINT ANSGAR AND THE NINTH CENTURY

### *In Quest of Unity*

If tragedy is that which begins in joy and ends in sorrow, there was tragedy aplenty in this ninth, the darkest of centuries. The ideal of a Holy Roman Empire, with the Pope representing the spiritual, the Emperor in control of the temporal, presented tremendous difficulties. Men might dream of a great day when a King of the Franks would rule religiously, reign gloriously Christlike, ere the end of time. High hope! bold dream! but, alas, far from the sad truth. For the entire history of the period shows that war was always in the air, arrogant nobility and untaught clergy dwelt on the edge of darkness, while the masses, believing in wizards and the practice of the ordeal, had not as yet risen above a state of semi-savagery. The age was ignorant, coarse and cruel, yet Charles the Great (Charlemagne), zealous and masterful, set about building up a system of education, proceeding with magnificent courage. He knew the world lay in the hands of four great powers—two Christian, two Mohammedan; and he wanted to make his state secure, dominant, truly Christian. All children, he ruled, even those of serfs, should be taught; and he urged the bishops to open more schools in their sees, assisted in the foundation of many monasteries and founded, among schools for the clergy, his own famous "School of the Palace," staffing it with the best teachers in Christendom. But for all that, it cannot be denied that many of his methods were very devious, anything in fact but Christian; while professing the faith, his crusading spirit ran quite mad; while making law for the clergy, he refused to let go the property of the Church. Under his

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

eagle eye, dukes governed their provinces, counts controlled their districts, bishops ruled their dioceses, but appeals could be made at any time to an imperial tribunal. On the other hand, Charles sought to root out error and secure unity at the price of cruel force — “either Baptism or the sword!” Hence those merciless campaigns in Old Saxony and among the Avars; sad to say, many warrior-bishops and abbots, enlisted in his ranks, stood coldly by as multitudes of the vanquished were forced to submit to Baptism. Still worse was his conduct when he beheaded forty-five hundred Saxons and then retired into camp to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. The Emperor’s adviser and friend, Alcuin, protested against such outrageous, unconscionable coercion. “Of what use,” he wrote, “is Baptism without faith? How can a man be compelled to believe what he does not believe?” All such counsels, alas, fell on deaf ears, for Charles was determined that the Gospel should advance step by step with his kingdom. But Alcuin was right, as time proved; though Christianity did spread from the Rhine to the Elbe it frequently found only feigned conformity, ready apostacy, and ultimate revolt.

There were, obviously, cockles in the Wheatfield of God, and the Church had to hoe many a row ere she could reap the harvest. In her great task Louis the Pious, son of Charles the Great, proved of great assistance. Louis who succeeded his father in 814 was a conscientious Frank who had shown himself to be an able general and administrator. But on the throne the kindly Emperor fell an easy prey to schemers, the worst being his own sons. Having divided his Empire among them, he found to his grief that not only did they war among themselves but even turned on their royal benefactor, forcing him to abdicate and seek refuge in a monastery. Upon Louis’ death these graceless sons, Lothair, Louis the German and Charles the Bald, instead of

## *Saint Ansgar and the Ninth Century*

checking the encroachment of Saracens and Northmen, indulged in petty squabbles and vigorously opposed the Church. Lothair whose private life was "as dastardly as lustful," rose up against Pope Nicholas; Charles the Bald and Louis the German constantly quarrelled with Pope Adrian. Besides corruption in high places the Church had difficulties of doctrine to contend with time and again. One of her sorest trials was the religious quarrelling, *odium theologicum*, rampant everywhere. All through the first fifty years there were theological disputes, thorns in the side of the papacy. Three great controversies, touching on the Nature of Christ, the Eucharist and Predestination, occupied the minds of the more intelligent faithful. The second half of the century witnessed the renewal of that age-old conflict between the Byzantine Church and Rome. The Greeks, blindly jealous of the growing power of the papacy, fell into schism and paved the way for deeper disunion. Councils were kept busy holding the erring ones in check, while the faithful bishops were hard put to it to control nobles drunk with power. Many a baron unable to write his own name took the law into his hands, scorning the welfare of his subjects, mindful only of honors and principalities. The tide of evil that swept over the Holy Roman Empire called for gigantic effort, what with all the murder and crime abroad, the worse than pagan conduct of rival kingdoms, the widespread treachery in the household of the faith. You will have noticed that in just such troubled times great saints appear, like lilies growing on a dunghill. One of these, closely linked with the age, shall now receive our first consideration.

### *An Elect Frank*

In the falling darkness you can see a mud-stained traveller hastening north — it is Ansgar, the Frank, on his way through

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

fog-laden, rain-scourged Vikingland to convert the pagan Danes. This amazing pioneer, born of humble parents in Picardy on the English Channel, was only five when, upon the death of his mother, he entered cloister-school! As he grew up under Benedictine tutors the language he learned might be called the beginning of modern French, a corrupt tongue neither Latin nor French; the chief subjects taught were writing, reading and arithmetic, while the discipline consisted mainly in flogging. An active lad, given to rough sports, Ansgar at first displayed little liking for studies, less for discipline. One night, lost in some dark corner of the place, the little fellow sought in vain to find his way out. Our Lady appeared, companied with saints in dazzling white robes. On seeing his mother among the elect, Ansgar ran to her, and heard the Blessed Mother say, "My son, do you wish to come to your mother? Know that if you would share in her happiness, you must fly from vanity, lay aside childish follies, and abide in holiness of life. For we detest all vice and idleness; neither can they who delight in such things be joined in our company." Ansgar became a different person after that, so different that his noisy pals were hard put to explain the great change in the erstwhile rough and ready playboy. His piety, however, remained childlike, while his devotion to Our Lord and His Blessed Mother became more earnest and constant, as the growing boy manifested before all a spirit as generous as it was ideal. It was his daily custom when going to school to turn aside into a little wayside oratory and there to pray in secret. One day as he rose from his knees, he saw Our Lord clothed in Jewish garments, radiant and beautiful. Ansgar fell to his knees, and Christ in a sweet voice bade him arise, saying: "Confess thy sins, Ansgar, that thou mayest receive pardon." "What need is there, O Lord," the lad replied, "that I should tell

### *Saint Ansgar and the Ninth Century*

them to Thee, seeing that Thou knowest them all?" "I know them, indeed," Our Lord replied, "none the less I would have thee confess them that thou mayest be justified." And then Ansgar declared all the sins he had ever committed since childhood, this first general confession bringing to him the consoling assurance that he had received their full remission. Day after day the elect youth became nearer to God, so that by the time he had reached his majority he chose to enter the Benedictine monastery at Corbie, in Picardy.

#### *Monks of Corbie*

Old Corbie had seen much in its day. Built on ground broken by Columban's followers from Luxeuil, it had witnessed the decline of the Merovingian and the rise of the Carolingian dynasty. Louis the Pious, sometimes called its founder, often visited this monastery, knowing how valiantly its members shared his father's dream of extending the reign of Christ in the hearts of men. Here he found the ideal Holy Roman Empire in miniature, for Corbie was typical of the Benedictine monasteries in the ninth century. The monks after years of labor had built an abode where peace ruled and the spirit of piety prevailed. The cloister precincts could count many buildings, each having its own part to serve in the communal pattern. First came the abbey church, heart of the whole establishment, then the abbot's stately house with its kitchen and storerooms. There were schools for externs along with the cloister-school; the former housed the sons of neighboring nobles and freemen, the latter provided for those who wore the frock since they expected to enter the order. Ample provision was made for travellers in hospices where they found hearty welcome; there were infirmaries too and dispensaries to meet the need of the sickly at home and afield. A little beyond the main buildings,

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

hidden by hedges were the houses of tailors and shoemakers, weavers and brewers, masons and carpenters, connected, all of them, with the abbey. This little community surrounded by a palisade, moat and turreted wall, enjoyed a life all its own, in the world but not of it. Outside the walls the monks might be seen plowing the fields, raising stock and produce; often on their way to care for the sick in the district whom they rescued from many a threatened epidemic. Folk came to visit the abbey time and again; journeymen to learn the handicrafts; scholars to buy, beg, or use copies of treasured manuscripts; even kings and nobles seeking surcease from strife in this godly place of spiritual refreshment. For such in fact was Corbie and none knew better than the ruling powers what wholesome influence as well as protection the abbey offered to all round about. Ambitious, quarrelsome conquerors might wield their swords and spears, but these soldiers of Christ had turned the sword into a ploughshare, the spear into a pruning hook, thus bringing the angel's prophetic promise into the sweet reality of peace on earth to men of good will.

Amid such surroundings Ansgar, the Benedictine, spent his early manhood. The evil doings of the outside world, remember, were not unknown to him, for the black monks enjoyed direct relation with the Holy See; they came and went on dangerous missions to reclaim souls for Christ. Aged monks who had soldiered with Charles the Great could tell Ansgar harrowing tales of the flintlike warriors they had encountered in the north country. Old Saxony, he learned, lay along the course of the Elbe, the Elder, the Ems and the Weser, including the seacoast with Jutland and Denmark, the lowlands of the Rhine and the shores of Batavia. News arrived betimes of the fierce Vikings sailing the seas, armed with knife, lance and Danish axe. No river city in Frankland was safe —

### *Saint Ansgar and the Ninth Century*

Paris, Rouen, Nantes, Bordeaux — all had suffered. With what mingled feelings of sorrow and mercy Ansgar received such word, we are not told, for just now love enwrapped his days in the novitiate, in the chapel, everywhere. His teacher, Paschasius Radbertus, poet, musician and theologian, found the young scholar an admirable subject and quickly recommended him for his fidelity and devotion. As school-master Ansgar excelled, though deeper in his soul than any esteem for art or science was the unquenchable desire to bring the Gospel to the poor and ignorant in distant lands. True monk that he was, he continued his studies and stuck to his teaching post, awaiting the hour when Providence should direct his path beyond Corbie. It happened that one of his innocent pupils, Fulbert by name, was hit on the head with a slate and seriously injured. Hour after hour, day after day, Ansgar stayed by the bedside of the feverish restless boy. That Fulbert had the makings of a saint his master could see during that long vigil, so patiently did the lad bear the painful wound, so sweet his resignation, so willing his forgiveness of the assailant. Ansgar continued his nursing and consoling ministry until ordered by his superiors to take some repose. Wan and weary after the long vigil he fell into a deep slumber wherein God vouchsafed him a wondrous vision. He saw Fulbert carried aloft to Heaven in the hands of angels and placed in the ranks of the martyrs. From the deep joy of this revelation he was presently snatched when an instructor roused him and broke the news of the lad's death. "This comfort," says Ansgar's biographer, "was given that he might not grieve overmuch for the death of the child, but might rather rejoice at the happy state of his soul." Near and dear to God the young master certainly was, with a hearty longing to serve, and an overwhelming desire to teach the most neglected. No joy would have been

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

greater than to be chosen to spread the gospel seed among the Viking dwellers in the Northland.

### *Sons of the Fjord*

The young Benedictine must have often gazed in fancy into dim pagan lands, seeing "men as trees walking!" But the time to go forth was not yet, for now his superiors chose Ansgar to help colonize a monastery. New Corbie, as it was called, was founded by a convert soldier who built the abbey in 822. Ansgar and a group of monks went about the task of improving the cloister-school, teaching difficult Saxon youth and working in the fields. Set apart by God for still greater achievements, the day came when Ansgar's dreams found realization. It appears that Harold, the recently baptized King of Denmark, besought the Emperor Louis for missionaries with zeal and courage to plant the faith in his dark land. Walla, Abbot of New Corbie and nephew of Charles the Great, fixed on Ansgar who joyfully accepted the mission despite the criticism of friend and foe, all of whom had something to say. In company with King Harold and a brother monk, Ansgar set out for the land of the Vikings. They sailed in a very dirty but seaworthy boat with only two cabins where the King and his companions were cramped and confined. That mattered little, however, for the young Benedictine's heart was in the school he planned to open for the sons of the Fjord. By this time the Danes had established themselves in Frisia and Holland, now they took to the farther seas — "the pathway of the swan," and ravaged right and left. No feeling of infirmity plagued these cold-blooded sea rovers, ever ready to take impossible risks. "The blasts aid our oars," they sang as they rowed, "the hurricane is our servant, and drives us whither we wish to go." And wherever they went they brought terror, war for them

## *Saint Ansgar and the Ninth Century*

being just a mad sport in which they slew men and abused women with their wonted bestiality. Now and then they won foothold on a coast, as in Britain and Ireland; many of them stayed and merged with the native people, giving and taking, custom for custom.

In their fog-bound homeland the Vikings dwelt in a welter of ignorance, idolatry and intertribal strife. From pre-historic times these Nordic folk, active and independent, had lived their own strange life in a world apart. Proud, flushed with sea-victory, they carried out their eerie rites in deep forests, under the sacred oak or by the linden. Human sacrifice was offered, as in Lake Hertha into whose cold waters they cast a young man and beautiful maiden every year to appease their old Germanic gods. The violent Northmen boasted of those gods, pictured in the sagas as cruel giants, lying herques, evil spirits, wrathful and bloody in all their ways. Little wonder, then, that such benighted worshippers, sunk in the lowest moral morass, indulged in sexual crime of the blackest kind.

Into the Danish darkness, Ansgar at twenty-five made his unworried way, fully determined to expend himself if necessary and use every means under Heaven to show those twisted souls the Truth and the Life. No tougher soldiering for Christ could be imagined than to plant the gospel seed in such bitter soil. It had been tried before by Ebbo, the Archbishop of Rheims, but without success, a fact which daunted Ansgar not at all. Nor was he deterred by the failure of the Danish King who sold him down the river or by the perils of the journey, the physical hardship and daily sufferings on the missions. "The Viking activities," says an historian, "were at their height, war never ceased for a moment, acts of piracy and brigandage made the whole sea-coast desolate and were subversive of all security, all peace."

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

Yet Ansgar stayed on, preaching and baptizing, treading the wine-press alone as he strove to gain the good-will of those fierce men of the sea. A thing which he might indeed have won, had it not been for the explosive Harold whose acts hurt instead of helping the Christian cause. As a result the peaceful missionary had to share the fate of the cruel ruler, both being driven out of the country by the angry Danes. All his holy hopes now disappeared in the fog, and Ansgar, on his way back to Corbie, resolved to forget about the initial failure and with stolid courage make another plan for the future.

### *Ups and Downs*

The Danes had definitely and fiercely rejected the gospel message. For Ansgar there was the slow martyrdom of delay, until three years later he received his second mission assignment. Louis the Pious wanted the young Frankish monk to take spiritual charge of traders, Christian slaves and others in Björkö, the capital of Sweden. Thus it befell that Ansgar, full of hope, crossed the seas in company with the imperial ambassadors. They pushed their way into ghastly swamps, lit their camp-fires, and blazed a trail through oak and beech. Wild animals harried the newcomers, but these were nothing compared to the natives with their wolfish caution and bearish ways. When they reached Björkö, the Benedictine pleaded with the King for permission to preach the Gospel to his subjects. Bjorn, who admired his manfulness, granted the request, so that in 830 the indefatigable monk was able to evangelize the Maelarsee district. By this time the ambassadors, having run afoul of the wild folk, lost their courage and decided to return home. But the tough-fibred missionary stuck it out and put up with every threat and danger. Hardly had the quitters disappeared over the

## *Saint Ansgar and the Ninth Century*

horizon than he began his one-man journey up country, following fresh animal tracks, speaking to all who would give ear to the Gospel. They were strange people, these Norse — with you today and away tomorrow; the pioneer had to proceed with utmost care, watching each step, else they might have run amok and slain him on the spot. Zeal stood by him, zeal and love of souls, the two arms that enabled him at the start to win from King Bjorn the privilege of preaching. For eighteen months Ansgar, alone among the Vikings, continued this daring adventure for Christ, while his fame as a shrewd, kindly Frank spread over creek and wood path. The Northmen always admired the brave, their boast being that one of their own could outdo any three foes; and they must have been won over by the cool judgment of the intrepid stranger who seemed equal to every difficulty. It is scarcely surprising, then, that success attended his second venture and Herigar, chief of the royal councillors, embraced the faith. Best of all Ansgar, aided by steadfast converts, was able to build a Catholic church.

So successful was the Swedish mission that the Corbie monk, again at the Emperor's desire, was created Archbishop of Hamburg and went to Rome, where he received the pallium from Pope Gregory IV. More than that, the pontiff made him legate to the northern nations — Swedes, Danes and Slavs. The veteran missionary, ever mindful of the Swedes, sent Bishop Gausbert with other priests to continue the far-north missions. But once more the poison of perfidy permeated Vikingland; the bishop was driven out and his nephew met with death. Set back in one field, Ansgar tried another. Let the heathen rage, he would tackle the task again and again. Thanks to his monastic training he was able to revive the Abbey of Terholt in Flanders and establish a flourishing school. The most happy relations existed

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

between the Archbishop and his flock for over a decade, only to be shattered when the sea-wolves, aggressive as ever, took to all-out raids. In 845 Eric, King of Jutland, appeared off Hamburg with a fleet of eight hundred vessels, bringing terror to the inhabitants. The marauders crept up stream, destroyed all dwellers on the banks, and indulged in bestial acts over which the chronicler draws the veil. They sacked and burned the city with its newly built church; the rare priceless books, bequeathed the monastery by Louis the Pious, went up in smoke. Ansgar, reduced to dire poverty, had to wander from place to place until he reached Bremen. All these tragic experiences, enough to take the heart out of any man, did not dismay the saint who was profoundly grateful to God that most of his flock had escaped the Vikings.

### *Germes of Decay*

Let us turn now from this mission episode to the state of affairs in the West. Hard upon Ansgar's flight from Hamburg came fresh trials for the Church and her faithful children. The Empire, divided by Louis the Pious among his three sons, was threatened with collapse. Lothair, Louis the German and Charles the Bald, coveted one another's lands, robbed right and left, and lost all true regal authority. Lothair and Charles joined against Louis; Louis and Charles seized Lothair; Charles' vassals ran away with Lothair's daughter. Even after the battle of Fontenoy in 841 and the Treaty of Verdun in 843 dynastic rivalries continued, blackened by violence and treachery. The historian of those days does not exaggerate when he declares: "Innocent blood is shed unavenged, the fear of kings and of law has departed from men, with closed eyes the people are approaching hell-fire." How little the Frankish rulers respected the clergy and vice versa is seen in the story told of Charles the Bald

## *Saint Ansgar and the Ninth Century*

and John Scotus Eriginus,<sup>1</sup> the ablest theologian of the Carolingian times. Both king and monk loved an argument. This day the two faced each other across the festal board and the King insultingly asked: "How differs Scot from sot?" "Table!" the Irishman boldly replied. One can easily understand saintly Ansgar's difficulties in such a crazy world, the difficulties of a man of God, too noble, too apostolic-minded to suit regal schemers. In the widespread land-grabbing, part of his new diocese in Flanders had been attached by Charles the Bald under protest of its zealous shepherd. Louis — of all people — jumped into the breach and made his brother return the stolen see. The successors of Charles the Great, it is clear, wanted to maintain supremacy in church administration; they were never content with negative advantages but ever ready to control ecclesiastical affairs. And when Rome interposed, the Frankish Kings, backed by many servile churchmen, set themselves against the Vicar of Christ though they knew in their hearts that the aims of the Church were aims of justice, goodness and peace.

All the time Ansgar moved in the thick of the fray, Pope Leo IV had to face trial after trial. For, while the North Atlantic was swept by pirate Vikings, the hateful Saracens overran Mediterranean coasts and shadowed the Italian cities. In August, 846, a Moslem fleet, having landed at Ostia, discharged thousands of Arabs who looted the basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul, shouting as they plundered, "There is but one God and Mohammed is the Prophet of God." The city itself was saved only by stout walls built by generations of the faithful; yet the heathen established themselves at Bari on the Garigliano. Three years later, the southern seaports, Amalfi, Gaeta, and Naples, formed a wartime league, the first in the Middle Ages. As far as could be seen ahead, conditions promised to be worse instead of better unless

<sup>1</sup> Eriginus = from the Isle of Saints

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

drastic steps were taken. Accordingly these cities united their fleets and formed a treaty with Pope Leo who invited the captains to the Vatican where they swore loyalty to the common cause. Then the pontiff led the Roman militia to Ostia, blessed both army and navy, and administered Holy Communion to the men. In this year of peril, 849, when the safety of Christendom was again menaced by its worst foe, Leo fell on his knees and prayed: "Lord, Thou Who savedst Peter from sinking when walking on the waves of the sea, Thou Who rescuedst Paul from the depths . . . mercifully hear us, and by the merits of these saints grant power to the arms of Thy believing servants, who fight against the enemies of Thy Church, that through their victory Thy Holy Name may be glorified amongst all nations." The Pope had just returned to the Vatican when the Saracen sails could be seen offshore. Straightway the fearless Neapolitans rowed out to meet them and suddenly, amid clash of prows, a storm arose, throwing everything into confusion. By the time the fury of wind and rain had ceased the enemy fleet had disappeared, sunk or wrecked. Many of the Moslem survivors swam to the Tyrrhene Islands, only to be slain on the shore. Many more fell into the hands of the League captains who executed them forthwith in Ostia or brought them in chains to Rome.<sup>2</sup> Thus the Eternal City was saved once more from the hands of the invader, while the Pope proceeded to deal firmly with three great problems: stronger defense of Rome, freedom of the Church from secular interference, and the abolition of simony, a sin which brought dire consequences in its wake.

### *Ports of Entry*

The year after the Saracen fleet disappeared in the depths of the Mediterranean, Ansgar ruled the two sees of Hamburg

<sup>2</sup> Gregovarius, *Rome in the Middle Ages*

## *Saint Ansgar and the Ninth Century*

and Bremen. There must be no pause in the quest for souls; set-backs only proved a greater reason for new strides. Cold skies and racing clouds had no more menace for him than the troubled waters, so typical of the folk to whom his life is committed. He was more than ever willing to face any peril and meet every challenge of paganism. Now he was really ready — and he almost fifty! His frail craft cut the creeks along the north shore; his fellow-monks studied the sea, the stars, with foes in their wake; they could sight Viking raiders, braving the storms of the stark gray coasts. As an envoy of Louis the German he visited Denmark again, that same land from which he had been driven so long ago. King Eric, forgetting the past, bade him welcome, in fact liked him so well that he recalled the priests exiled from his domains. Won by Ansgar's sweetness of character, the proud Norse yielded point after point to the gain of the faith. In 850 the first church was erected in Schleswig, in 851 one rose at Ripan. The following year the veteran missionary visited Björkö in the Maelarsee — after an absence of nearly a quarter of a century — but by this time he was well used to deep swamps and treacherous waterways. On this occasion he again met with a friendly reception and tactfully gained the King's favor, by inviting him to dinner and making him presents. The nobles gathered to decide whether or not the missionary should be given permission to preach. They drew lots and the response was favorable. Once more Ansgar became a familiar figure, laboring for Christ with wound-proof spirit. On his return to Hamburg, full of zeal for souls, he sent priests to evangelize Sweden. No matter where he journeyed, the Archbishop, loaded with tremendous responsibilities, never ceased to be Ansgar of Corbie, eminent as ever for his piety, self-rule and spirit of service. He built hospitals, ransomed captives, dispensed alms. He even em-

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

ployed his pen to write verse on the margins of his Book of Psalms, and found time to relate the story of his predecessor, Willehad, first Bishop of Bremen. His carefully kept diaries provided the material for Adam of Bremen's great work, *De situ Danae*. In point of fact, the world is indebted to him for the first description of Scandinavia, its customs, religion, and language; for Ansgar was the pioneer who wrote, not from rumor or report, but who put down what his eyes saw, his ears heard, his hands felt.

Nothing could be more inspiring than the spirit of this great Apostle of the Vikings. Go forth, he told his monks, go forth without fear, comfort the afflicted, care for the sick, win souls for God. Buy those young Danes sold in the market, send them to Corbie for Christian upbringing. And be sure of it they will come back some day as heralds of faith to their own people. O that he could himself start over again, but by this time he was too old for active service and unable to brave wild seas and rock-bound coasts. Even so, he could watch and pray, labor and write, make decisions and wait upon action. No thought had he of deviating from his life's work, as hopefully he looked ahead to the harvest. "More zeal, more monks!" was his constant cry. Did not Pope Gregory IV give him jurisdiction over Iceland and the remote Greenland? Yes, and the hearts of those poor pagans far away must be reached. With rare tact, courage, charity he dealt with fresh mission problems and difficult situations. And he looked to Corbie for sorely needed recruits, that holy home being ever close to his heart. It had grown to be a great place since first he had plowed the ground there; it had furnished many monks for Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Well, he must have more! Time was short and Viking souls were at stake! Such then was the drive and energy of Ansgar, the Apostle, in his latter days as in his

## *Saint Ansgar and the Ninth Century*

earlier. Age could not dim that flaming spirit, and he kept a manful hand on the tiller until he had given last instructions to his co-pilot, Rembert, who succeeded in the See of Hamburg. The year 865 saw the valiant old navigator of God cast off from his earth-bound harbor. He was sixty-six when, at the Master's call, he entered the Eternal Sea.

After the death of Ansgar the times grew more and more desperate. There were crises when it looked as if the Rock of Peter might be swamped by waves of barbarians. The hopes of Pope Leo and Charles the Great came nearer to destruction, for no man appeared big enough to rule the Frankish Empire which they called the Holy Roman Empire. If the sons of Louis the Pious failed in a great mission their sons proved the truth of the scripture: "The fathers have eaten a sour grape and the teeth of the children are set on edge."<sup>3</sup> Louis II, son of Lothair, succeeded to his father's throne, but chaos ruled while local rulers had their own way much as they pleased. Like his scheming parent, Louis tried to control the Pope, Nicholas I (858-887), only to find he had mistaken his man. The devout but firm pontiff refused to countenance the marriage of Lothair II of Lorraine who had divorced his wife to wed a mistress. In 836, imperial troops entered Rome and imprisoned the Pope but to no purpose; for Nicholas, nothing daunted, stood adamant by the law of God. More trying than such conflicts with the civil power were the heartbreaks this great Pope suffered from prelates who defied the Holy See. He had to punish the powerful Archbishop of Rheims for deposing a dutiful bishop and he excommunicated John of Ravenna for sheer perfidy — all this in the face of the Emperor's protests. There seemed no end to the trials that beset the man of God, what with prince-bishops, tyrants in their rich sees; abbots who rode

<sup>3</sup> Jeremias XXXI, 29

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the war-saddle better than they ruled their subjects; all sorts of lords seeking cruel power over small-sized villages or heavily fortified kingdoms. Lay and clerical, many of them refused allegiance to Rome, and even defied the laws of God. Not only were they lax and indifferent to higher things, but they also indulged in bloody, bitter warfare. Each had his army of retainers ready to fight at the drop of a glove, equally ready to waylay and rob the weak. Such crooked action inevitably begot crooked thought which in turn led to still more crooked conduct.

### *The Real Dark Ages*

This period of confusion witnessed the revolt of Photius, an ambitious upstart, brilliant but misguided, who had taken all his Holy Orders in six days. Though there had been quarrels aplenty between the East and the West, the schism he created was the first in their relations. Photius appears as the worst of Byzantine mischief-makers, for so great was his thirst for honors that he schemed day in and day out to win for himself the Patriarchate of Constantinople. He assailed the Latin Church because it legislated fasts on Saturday, began Lent three days later than in the East, and did not allow its priests to be married. The Pope, Nicholas the Great, had to excommunicate the wicked pretender who in revenge persuaded the Emperor Michael (842-867) to sit in judgment on the Vicar of Christ. A circular letter, issued by the synod in 866, deposed the pontiff and declared the refusal of the Eastern Church to accept the phrase, "the Holy Ghost Who proceeded from the Father and the Son." That same year Michael, who had abetted Photius, met his death in a drunken brawl, and his successor, Basil the Macedonian (867-886), expelled the troublesome schismatic. When the rightful Patriarch Ignatius was restored, he directly

### *Saint Ansgar and the Ninth Century*

sought reconciliation with Rome. But the damage had been done; a widening of the breach towards ultimate separation. True, the Eighth General Council of the Universal Church took place in 869 at Constantinople, but at the death of Ignatius, ten years later, Photius was again in power. As might be expected the Pope refused to recognize the upstart who continued his disruptive course until the new Emperor Leo IV (886-912) drove him out of Constantinople.

If East was still an evil East, West was the West of chaos. Ever since the fall of Louis the Pious in 833 the Empire through sheer force of events lay open to foes eager to stamp out the people and their culture. The Northmen now began organized invasions, the Moslem renewed their age-old attacks against a defenceless continent. In 845 Vikings entered deeper into the domains of Charles the Bald; the very next year Saracens ravaged the tomb of the Apostles. By the turn of the half-century the Bulgars, a Slavic people, had settled on the outskirts of the Empire, while the Magyars, a Finnish-Turko race, raided the Carolingian territories. But far worse than such barbarian incursions was the invasion of evil forces into high places. A number of pontiffs appeared, victims of vice, weakness and faction; they were on the whole no better than Charles the Bald, Charles the Fat, Louis the Stammerer, whose nicknames bear the stamp of the contempt public opinion accorded them. Only two truly great Popes can be found among the dozen who reigned in the Chair of Peter during the last half of the century. Nicholas the Great (858-867) maintained the independence of the Holy See, refusing to yield to either Eastern or Western Emperor; he fought the good fight against powerful Byzantine schismatics, against his own recalcitrant bishops, even against Louis II and his invading armies. John VIII (872-882) also stood unconquerable during a whole decade of violence and

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

bloodshed. "If all the trees in the forest," he wrote, "were turned into tongues they could not describe the ravages of impious pagans. The bishops are wandering about in beggary or fly to Rome, the only place of refuge." Yet this stalwart pontiff, an active general, fought the Frankish nobles to a standstill; as an admiral he cleared the Italian coasts of the Moslem fleets, only to be poisoned and have his skull smashed with a hammer. His consecrated successors took little heed of their tremendous responsibility and failed to feed the flock of God. One may even say, therefore, that most of them were a venal lot with little about them to revere and nothing to approve. This does not mean that the Church failed either in moral or doctrinal teaching; it only proves that the Spouse of Christ survives and will continue to the end of time in spite of her enemies within or without. Pope Marinus displayed the character of a weakling; Adrian III failed to check the guileful Formosus, Bishop of Porto, who actually won his way to the papal throne. The spineless Stephen V, after five years' misrule, was strangled to death. Romanus and Theodore accomplished nil, having but a half-year to reign; and, after them, promising John IX and Benedict IV brought to a tragic close a century during which the Chair of Peter seemed only a brigand's prize and the imperial crown a mere war-trophy. The dissolution of the Empire was now well under way and the progress of Christian civilization came to a dead stop.

# Saint Bernard

## APOSTLE OF THE ALPS

# SAINT BERNARD OF MENTHON AND THE TENTH CENTURY

<i>Emperors</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
NO EMPERORS FOR 60 YEARS	Italy in chaos 900	BENEDICT IV, 900-903 LEO V, 903 SERGIUS III, 904-911
CONRAD of Franconia, 911-918 (King)	Magyars overthrow Moravian Kingdom 908 Vikings continue their raids 910 Foundation of Cluny 910 Hungarians invade Germany 911 Condition of Europe at its worst 913	LANDUS, 913-914 John X, 914-928
HENRY I of Saxony, 919-936 (King)	League against the Saracens 915 Pope John routs Saracens at Garigliano 916	
	Bernard of Menthon born in Savoy 923	LEO VI, 929 STEPHEN VIII, 929-930 JOHN XI, 931-936
OTTO I, of Saxony, 936-962 (King)	Benedictine taproots of universities 930 Alberic seizes Papal States	LEO VII, 936-939
	Leo VII mistreated by Alberic 936 Otto crowned at Aachen 936 Abbey of St. Gall burned by wayward pupil 937	STEPHEN IX, 939-942 MARINUS II, 942-946 AGAPITUS II, 946-955
	Death of Odo of Cluny 942 Bernard student under Peter of Aosta 943	
	Otto delivers Papacy from bondage 951 Otto conquers the Magyars 955	JOHN XII, 955-964
OTTO I, Crowned Emperor, 962-973	Pope John crowns Otto Emperor 962 Bernard founds famous hospice 962	BENEDICT V, 964-965 JOHN XIII, 965-972
	Bernard founds hospice in Graian Alps 965 Otto crushes the Roman factions 966 Bernard, Archdeacon of Aosta 966 Riots break out in Rome 973	BENEDICT VI, 973-974 BENEDICT VII, 974-983
OTTO II, Crowned Emperor, 973-983	Bernard evangelizes cantons of Lombardy 975	JOHN XIV, 983-984
OTTO III, Crowned Emperor, 983-1002	Pope John receives Bernard in Rome 984 John Gualberto born in Florence 985 Capets wipe out the Carolingian Line 987 Sergius attacks the Holy See 998	JOHN XV, 985-996 GREGORY V, 996-999 SYLVESTER II, 999
	Gerbert becomes Pope Sylvester II 999 Bernard lives into next century (d. 1008)	

## SAINT BERNARD AND THE TENTH CENTURY

### *The Chaotic Century*

How fared the Holy Roman Empire in these days? Was the dream of Leo III any nearer reality: two great rulers, Pope and Emperor each in his distinct sphere, working hand in hand to bring the Kingdom of God on earth. Alas, nothing of the kind; there was no great Pope, not even an Emperor worthy of the name, until the century was well spent. You are going to behold Europe bowed and bloody, cursed with a thousand disorders and afflictions. The precursory signs of decay had long showed in a society which resembled the old tribal groups rather than any system of law, order and religion. For in these times powerful counts did much as they chose, barons held sway over vast lands, kings and nobles led a semi-nomadic life wandering from one estate to another. The Church found herself in the midst of a feudal world whose habit was war, war, and then war. Frankland, victim of Viking raids, stood on the edge of dissolution — "the cities are depopulated, the monasteries ruined and burned, the country reduced to solitude."<sup>1</sup> Germany was controlled by Conrad and his successor, Henry the Fowler, an unlettered barbarian, who acted like war-leaders at the head of their confederation. Spain lay prostrate under the heel of the Moor, while Italy was torn apart by contending factions. Worst of all, the Holy See was victimized by Theophylact and the evil women of his house, Marozia, the Senatrix in particular, mother and murderess of Popes. It is not pleasant to review the history of Judas Iscariots who fell to lower and lower moral levels. How

<sup>1</sup> Acts of the Synod of Trosle, in 909

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

low is indicated by the fact that the Church, rocked to and fro by fierce storms, was hard put to keep alive the standards of civilization. "It is impossible," said her Divine Builder, "that scandals should not come; but woe to him through whom they come."<sup>2</sup>

Now, more than ever, two systems stood in open conflict, the peace-system of the ancient Church and the war-system of the feudal nobility. On one side, episcopal cities with their cathedral, courts, and monasteries, made for peace and order. On the other, counts behind their castle walls dwelt more "like beasts of prey in their dens," ready at any time to wage war with their neighbors. The military aristocracies plundered the monasteries, lived off the land, snatched authority from the spiritual arm. The Church labored to educate and Christianize, but her hands were tied, what with canon law thrown to the winds and great land-owners holding their ill-gotten gains. By mid-century, as you will notice, she was in bad straits, feeble locally as well as in her center, Rome. And even when her loyal sons fought against tyranny, plunder and murder, many of her *soi-disant* leaders cast their lot with the powers of the earth. Bishops and clergy often sided with the arrogant nobility, abbots and monks frequently went worldly, satisfying their pride of life. The Chair of Peter became a bone of contention: evil, unfit men looked upon the papacy with covetous eyes, royal houses fought like wild dogs to secure its prestige. Irony outdoes itself in calling such a chaos the Holy Roman Empire. The truth is that "Holy" is a misnomer, "Roman" spelled infamy, "Empire" existed only in the ambitions of upstart rulers.

Yet, during those agonizing years the gospel seed long buried in stony ground had begun to swell; the next century

<sup>2</sup> Luke XVII, 2

## *Saint Bernard and the Tenth Century*

would see it shoot forth and conquer the thorns hostile to its growth.

### *A Young Noble*

A great planter of this good seed was Bernard of Menthon who now engages our attention. His history was remarkable, even romantic to a degree, and his life covered the larger part of the tenth century. Born in 923, the only child of noble parents, Richard and Bernoline de Doingt, he grew up in the Chateau of Menthon, on the Lake of Annecy. This district of the Frankish Empire belonged to the Kingdom of Upper Burgundy between the Swiss Jura and the Pennine Alps. Most likely Bernard's father had him educated in a cloister school where, along with music, mathematics and letters, he studied the chronicles and the story of salvation. At home his tutor, Germain, inspired the young Savoyan with courage, idealism and high resolves; together they shared many dangers as they scaled great white peaks and gazed at ever-growing snowy heights beyond their reach. What lofty thoughts Bernard could entertain when they paused after a steep climb to survey the far-off beautiful valleys with their high-perched castles! You get the picture of stalwart leaders, lonely, exalted, apart; of homage and consecration to a noble cause. None of the knights he knew was like Nahon le Noir who imprisoned his decent man-at-arms in an iron-grated chamber until one day, after a struggle with its giant jailer, the soldier went mad. No, they were good knights like that count in far-off Spain who saw that a light ever blazed on his Aleala de Real and harbored the fugitive prisoners who escaped from the Moorish dungeons of Granada. Who could tell but that some day he, an only son and heir, would be able to do a deed like that, thus making amends

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

for the dog-eat-dog lives of the wicked. It came as a shock when the young man found out that his parents had planned he should marry the beautiful Marguerite de Miolans. His heart was aflame, not for any pretty damsel, but for the All-loving, All-lovable Son of God. And he had a clearly settled conviction, nay had secretly decided to enter religion. As soon as his parents suspected his plans, they dismissed Germain and saw to it that Bernard was carried off to the Castle of Miolans, thinking the maiden's charms would break his holy resolution. The night before the wedding, however, Bernard, leaving a note to his father, made his escape by dropping down from a balcony. Quickly he scaled the high wall and started out on the long trek toward "the mountain that healeth him who climbs." He journeyed all of a hundred miles up hill and across valley, then on to more difficult ascents before he reached the Pennine Alps.

The venerable Archdeacon of Aosta received the fugitive with open arms and took him under special care. One could see with half an eye that Bernard, gifted by grace as by nature, gave promise of great things in the years to come. More still, the exemplars he had were the best, full of vigor and faith and apostolic zeal. There were very able teachers, priests, monks and nuns, whose names have come down the ages. The greatest dramatist of the century was Hroswitha, a nun of Gersheim under the Abbess Gerberga, niece of the Emperor Otto. And a few decades earlier the Abbey of St. Gall housed one Totile — teacher, poet, painter, musician, sculptor, architect — a genius so illustrious that Charles the Fat used to curse roundly those who made him a monk thereby depriving the royal court of such a luminary. No doubt these religious went about their duties with single-minded devotion, their object being to serve God and man. "Neither for gold nor gifts," said an old Irish author, "did I

## *Saint Bernard and the Tenth Century*

undertake this task so great and difficult . . . only I prayed that my book might be beautiful." Well, that was the atmosphere of pure service which Bernard breathed as he mastered the principles of the Gospel. Peter of Aosta, observing the young novice's progress, decided he should go on for the priesthood, and Bernard hoped that once that high state was reached he would be sent on the missions. Oh, to be in the deep mountain wilderness laboring for the souls of ignorant and wild pagans! In God's good time the young priest entered upon a career fraught with zeal, piety and usefulness. The rest of his eighty-five years were destined to be spent in the far-flung Alps.

### *Growth of the Feudal System*

The son of gentle folk Bernard grew up in the heart of the feudal world. Begun in Gaul, the system had spread to Spain and Germany and by the tenth century was deep rooted in Italy. As the wide-eyed lad had moved about his father's chateau Germain had told him the story of feudalism and he had come to see both its use and abuse. The great nobles of an earlier day had to equip their armie with weapons and horses, so they wantonly seized any estate within reach, giving their supporters the usufruct or benefits. Then and there the chief aids took an oath of fidelity pledging themselves as vassals to the service of their lord. The holdings they received became known as fiefs, which were served in turn by others lower-down in the social scale. Every vassal had his sub-vassal who mustered knights and fighting men for the army; far down in the lowest level stood the poor peasants, serfs and villeins who tilled the fields, did the menial tasks, eked out a wretched existence. And so it went, rank and file living as best they could under a rough paternalism. One wonders just what Bernard thought of the

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

arrangement — as a child of his time he could imagine no other state of society. He must have regretted, however, the part the Church had come to play in the system; it was a sure guess that Charles, the Hammer, who sped feudalism on its way two centuries before never foresaw what had come to be an accepted thing. Popes were known to command armies and navies. Bishops rode out at the head of their forces to fight for their lands. Abbots barricaded their monasteries, while cloisters resounded to the baying of hounds and the voices of soldiery.

By early manhood Bernard had come to know that just as a good ruler could be a boon, an evil one proved the bane alike of Church and State. Nor could he fail to see how many tragedies followed on the abuse of great opportunity when lords lost the true character of nobility and scoffed at religion pure and undefiled. Like many tyrants in our own time they did not consider the interest of their fellowmen because pride and covetousness ruled their lives. On the other hand, there were lovers of justice who protected the poor and treated them generously. Such a one, Bernard might have told you, was Henry, a count beloved by all because he sought ways of peace. Look at this vivid picture and judge for yourself. "Upon the evenings of Sundays and holydays the young people of each village and farmhouse repaired to the courtyard of Henry's chateau, as the natural and proper scene for their amusement, and the family of the baron often took part in their pastime. On a certain day Henry invited all the world to an entertainment; rich and poor, nobles, knights and peasants were all equally accustomed to receive his invitations; but he had a discourteous and niggardly seneschal, who took pains to insult the guests. A poor ploughman, named Raoul, became the object of his insolence, though the seneschal, fearing that the count might observe him, had at length provided a place for the poor man. When the minstrels and

### *Saint Bernard and the Tenth Century*

jongleurs who sat at the end of the banquet table had exerted themselves to the utmost to amuse the count and the guests, Raoul advanced and kicked down the seneschal before the whole company. Then being called upon for an explanation, he related humbly to the noble Henry how his seneschal had treated him in a similar manner on his first entry, though he came to the castle on the count's general invitation. The count was highly delighted, as were all the company, and to Raoul was adjudged the prize of a robe which was to be given to the jongleur who caused most merriment in the hall." <sup>3</sup>

#### *Monks in the Field*

One cannot say that the feudal system was all wrong. On the contrary, as Bernard came to know, it was a period of growing pains in the life of Europe. And certainly the Church met the changing conditions most admirably when she had her way unimpeded. Her monasteries, ever in the forefront, led the advance to better things. St. Gall did more than its share to promote peace and good will among men when conditions in Western Europe were at their worst. Its abbots were famous throughout the century, its monks the best scholars of their time. The Huns threatened the place in 924 and many of the books and manuscripts had to be removed; in 937 a disastrous fire gutted the monastery, the library, however, escaped the flames. Far from being discouraged, the monks rebuilt on the ruins, while the library (its catalogue is still extant) was greatly extended. Then, there was Cluny in Saone-et-Loire, center of a great reform, destined to leave profound impress on the century. Make sure of it, these early years under St. Berno saw a highly centralized government and the abbots became potent agents against the abuses of the feudal system. They put up an

<sup>3</sup> Digby, Kenelm, *Mores Catholici*, Vol. I, p. 320

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

endless fight for integrity and independence, attacking the evils of simony, benefice and concubinage among the clergy. There was nothing tyrannical about the discipline at Cluny, since the rules, based on tradition and custom, arranged for all procedure in chapter-house, refectory, and in the nocturnal office. Laws for speaking and for silence obtained alongside laws for recreation and mortification; in fact everyone knew what was what and why — the exact time for sowing and digging and reaping, when beans and herbs were to be seasoned with oil or butter, on what days the monks could have fruits, eggs, spices, fish. All was carried out in accustomed order and united with real freedom, while the assumption of authority became a matter of mutual love. The worst punishment an abbot could inflict on his subjects was to leave the monastery, a thing almost as bad as being abandoned by Heaven.

Again, in feudal Germany, the Abbey of Fulda, St. Boniface's great foundation, still held an enviable place. Two centuries earlier it owned fifteen thousand plow lands, now it was a city with churches, schools, mills, hospitals and farm-buildings. Fulda exercised enormous moral force on the Saxons, for it trained the intellectual and religious leaders of that day. The vast wealth of the wide estate was regarded as the Patrimony of the Saint who founded it, not the possession of any superior or community. Even abbey serfs differed from those under a secular lord, and many a freeman was known to give up his civil status to become a "saint's man." No offering would be acceptable unless from donors who obeyed the precepts of Christ from a full heart. No time-serving there, nor any frenzied attempt to gain public acclaim either! Say then what you will about the dreadful darkness, the stark despair so prevalent in this tenth century, but do not forget it was the monks of the West who clung to

### *Saint Bernard and the Tenth Century*

the old classical culture, won the allegiance of barbarians and kept alive the idea of a Christian Empire. The monasteries, moreover, were training-schools of bishops famous for their piety and doctrine, the inspiration for many nobles of saintly virtue, the power houses of missionaries who went out to convert Danes and Normans, Poles, Bohemians and Hungarians.

### *The Tragedy of Europe*

The Alps, you will recall, are Europe's greatest bastion. Ideally placed, they dominate the Seine and the Rhone in France; the Rhine and Danube in Germany, Hungary and the Balkans, the Save in Yugo-Slavia and the Po in Italy. On the lower chains of this natural fortress Bernard of Menthon engaged himself in the work of his Master. At thirty, he must have realized that nothing could save Europe except truth and honesty, courage and fortitude, together with those prime qualities of the mountaineer — hard work and tenacity. From Alpine heights the Savoyan priest could view a broken Empire which by mid-century showed only ruin and decay. In the West after the death of Louis the Child (899-911) Frankland sank into the slough of disorder. Otto the Great (936-973) spent most of his early days controlling the nobles and putting down revolts. The Teuton King favored the clergy, giving them high posts, but with the understanding that the bishops and abbots would supply his army. He knew that the clergy could take better care of his royal chancery than the nobles; besides there was little danger of their coveting too much power. Italy's plight was still worse, for the papacy had reached the lowest depths in its long history. "The Roman Chair," said Augustine, "is the rock which the proud gates of hell do not conquer"; none the less those days witnessed dreadful attacks on the Church. An

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

infamous woman, Marozia, daughter of the still more wicked Theodora, brazenly set her two sons in high places: one John XI in the Chair of Peter, the other Alberic in command of the City. Then Alberic imprisoned his mother and unseated his brother, naming as successor his own son Octavian. This mere boy was none other than John XII whose unholy career so compromised the Church.

No age is without moral darkness here and there, but in this one period Italy almost reached eclipse. From the start of the century four rulers followed one another in quick succession. In 950 Berengar had himself "elected" King of Italy, imprisoned Lady Adelaide, widow of the deceased King Lothair. Otto, the German, joined in the fray; he entered Italy in 951, married Adelaide and put Berengar in charge of the government. But the scoundrel proved anything but a faithful vassal, while Alberic, who ruled the city of Rome, stood by, loath to interfere. Pope John XII, fearing an invasion, took desperate steps of far-reaching importance. In a black mood of rage he called upon Otto to come down and defend the Papal States. Otto, like all his ilk, had an eye on Italy, and especially on Rome, since the Eternal City had it in its power to satisfy his vaulting political ambitions. Both Rome and the Papacy were necessary to imperial power, since the law of Christendom empowered the Vicar of Christ alone to confer the title of Emperor with its office of supreme political rule. Easy then to understand how ready Otto was to go to the aid of John XII and acquire a stronger foothold in Italy. His own five nations — Lorraine, Saxony, Franconia, Swabia and Bavaria — were not enough to sate the power of the covetous German. So across the Alps he came and in 962 relieved the papal distress whereupon the young Pope crowned him Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Otto, when receiving the crown from the Pope, had ordered

## *Saint Bernard and the Tenth Century*

his sword-bearer to watch with weapon drawn lest there should be foul play while he knelt at the tomb of the apostle. It would be difficult to believe — if the records did not convince us — the shattering events of that day, the grisly fear and treachery on every side. After the death of John XII, the Popes, Leo VII, Stephen IX, Marinus II, and Agapitus, proved pious and decent men, yet inefficient executives incapable of giving a good account of their great stewardship. As one might expect, Church and State stood at swords' points; Rome was attacked and invaded by one vendetta after another; the populace resembled an eruptive mass ever on the verge of revolt.

### *Apostle of the Alps*

Did Bernard hear the tramp of German troops or catch the glint of their shields as they hastened Romewards through the Alps? Seeing the plight of his own little world he had become an apostolic-hearted missionary. The districts he evangelized were rife with treachery, ignorance and idolatry; not only were wayfarers exposed to the natural perils of Alpine travel, they were liable to attack by bandits who infested the mountain passes. Bernard aimed to tame the wild savages, hoping to bring peace by establishing a church for the natives and a hospice for visitors. There was an old pagan temple which he planned to use as a site, but meanwhile there was much work to be done, work such as Boniface and Gallus had accomplished centuries earlier. For forty-two years the zealous priest moved among benighted folk, preaching, working miracles, covering incredible distances far into the cantons of Lombardy. All his splendid energies were spent for the benefit of his fellow men; he flung himself into the battle for God while all about him wild creatures served Satan. One can guess the holy thoughts that crowded the

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

apostle's mind, one can even catch the psalmist song in his heart as he breasted the fiercest storms. Just listen:

He gives snow like flocks of wool,  
He scatters hoar-frost like ashes,  
He throws down His ice like crumbs;  
Who can stand before His cold!

Praise Him from the earth!  
Young men and maidens,  
Old men and children!  
Let them praise the Name of the Lord!<sup>4</sup>

Surely, that was the spirit of Bernard, praise in service, service in praise. And it brought its reward in 965 when his undying hope became shining reality. A monastery and hospice rose in the Pennines at the highest point of the pass, eight thousand feet above the sea level!

As the founder grew in sanctity his fame drew many visitors to the Alpine retreat. One day there appeared an aged couple, husband and wife, who had braved the long journey to meet the man whose name made Switzerland glorious. They told their gracious host how the light of their life had burned out the day their only son, come of age, had left his ancestral home; how the next day a fair maiden waited in vain at the altar for his appearance. He had disappeared as if into thin mountain air, and never a sight or light of him did they see in all the intervening years. The superior consoled them as best he knew, saying that perhaps God had called the young man to some higher career than marriage. Then rather abruptly he left them to pray for guidance, for Bernard had instantly recognized his beloved parents. While they were still discussing the kindly monk's resemblance to their long missing one, he returned, embraced his dear ones

<sup>4</sup> Ps. CXLVII-CXLVIII

### *Saint Bernard and the Tenth Century*

and startled them with the announcement: "I am your son Bernard!" They stayed at the hospice for many days before returning to Menthon with hearts full of joy and divine consolation. "Happy parents!" exclaims the chronicler, "happy parents! doubtless in the hours of immortality, you now possess that son whom you so long mourned in this land of exile, restored to you in an eternity of happiness where separations and afflictions are no more."

### *Disorders in Italy*

Judging from reports of Roman pilgrims who had stopped over at Bernard's Pennine retreat, the peninsula resembled a victim of creeping paralysis. The city of the Popes lay under a pall more deadly than the cones of Vesuvius; its moral eruptions were frightening, the lava of evil seemed to spread everywhere. No voice of hope or encouragement emerged from the confusion, none could foretell what might come to pass. Naturally, folk in a daze of despair thought the end of the world was at hand, and actually prepared for it. In 965 when Bernard was founding another hospice in the Graian Alps, John XIII was assaulted and imprisoned by a Roman faction which hated this German protector like poison. The Pope escaped to Capua and later returned in triumph, accompanied by Otto the Great. Twelve guilty tribunes who had persecuted him were promptly hanged; the corpse of the Prefect of the City, taken from the tomb, was quartered; and a frightened high official found himself dangling from a statue and flogged almost to death. So it went, year after year, fire and sword, revenge and savagery, all the strain and stress of war. One thing was certain, the Romans would always resent the imperial claim of the foreign Emperor whom they regarded as a barbaric interloper. Otto, on the other hand, determined to do much as he pleased with Church and

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

Empire, indeed, exactly the same as he had been doing for years in his German domains. This same Otto, remember, had used the Church for his ambitious schemes, making Bruno, his younger brother, the Chancellor and later Archbishop of Cologne. He regimented the clergy, chose many of them instead of lay-officers, for he feared the latter might grow powerful enough to thwart his deep-laid plans for the future. Always in the thick of things, he knew only too well how the nobility could repel kings, but he also learned, to his grief, that powerful feudal ecclesiastics were able to make it equally hot.

Otto the Great, after a stormy yet successful career, was succeeded by his son, Otto II, an unaffectedly pious man nowise given to his father's lust of power or ways of war. Even so, the Romans wanted no German King to come down and clamp his laws on a proud people who had led the Germans out of savagery. Not for the Church either to be cowed under the heel of a foreign garrison, however strong. From the very start, the excursions of the mighty Germans into Italy brought on endless conflict, since Pope and civil ruler could never harmonize their respective claims. Nor did matters improve even a little with the passage of time: the age-old hostility simply would not die down. Now it was flaming anew, if anything worse than before. Rome appeared ripe for extinction, as armies, like vultures, swung across the Alps, hovered above her carcass; the papacy, that bridge over which Christianity and civilization passed, was now a creaking thing in danger of being carried away by the flood of evil. Year after year the tumult continued among the Roman factions, and the Holy See still served as a puppet for aristocrat gangsters. When word of the coming of Otto II's envoys reached the rebel nobles, the Pope, Benedict VI, was strangled in his cell. The plotters installed a false Pope, Boniface VII,

## *Saint Bernard and the Tenth Century*

but when the Emperor's troops arrived in Rome, he fled to Constantinople, taking the riches of the Vatican treasury with him. Pale hope dawned, however, during the reigns of the last five Popes of the century. Benedict VII did much to check the simony and evil-doing which widely prevailed. John XIV, an astute and kindly pontiff, who sought peace and strove for unity, perished in a dungeon. John XV carried out his brief work worthily, though surrounded by heavy-handed nobles. Gregory V, the first Pope of German birth, kinsman of Otto III, ran into trouble with the Romans and had to fly for his life to Pavia. The Emperor took savage reprisals, whereupon Gregory was poisoned by his enemies. At the century-end a truly great genius, Sylvester II, ascended the papal throne. Hand in hand with Otto III the new Pope worked and toiled for the rebirth of a Holy Roman Empire.

### *Steps in the Dark*

Let us leave the blood-stained South for a view of Bernard's work in the Alpine world. His community caught the spirit of their master, so firm of will to preach and live the Gospel, so eager to go about doing good. They gave full praise to God and served their neighbors unfailingly. No matter how vile the weather they set out with extraordinary fortitude, accompanied by huge dogs with a little cask of wine hung from their stout collars. Man and beast stuck silently to the trails — blizzards howled across the mountain, snow piled deep, the cold cut into the very marrow of their bones. On they went in a genuine thrill of comradeship and when the animals smelled out a human in distress their cries brought the monks to the spot. Then the mercy work began; if the rescuers found the stranger alive he was carefully fed and set upon his feet; if dead they cared for the poor frozen body once the "Temple of the Holy Ghost." An equally difficult

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

task still lay ahead in swiftly speeding the return to the hospice. They gained strength from the fact that, once there, the living could be cared for in the infirmary, the departed given the reverent interment due a Christian. Seldom, indeed, were the spiritual and corporal works of mercy better performed than by these Alpsmen of God. Nowhere was a deeper impression made among helpless humanity than in that stark world of snow and ice. In 1004, four years before he entered the portal of death, Bernard made a journey down to Rome and received permission from Pope John XIV to found his own congregation, better known as the "Canons Regular of St. Augustine." The community grew so rapidly that by the sixteenth century they could count four hundred monasteries, two hundred of them in Ireland. Later their numbers dwindled; in our day, after a thousand years, they have forty members: the majority dwell in hospices, the rest have charge of parishes in the land of the eternal snow.

The work of Bernard and his monks furnishes the real clue to the mystery of Europe's survival. Their homes of mercy in the Alps proved on a comparatively small scale what was proved in other places on a large scale — Catholic action! That there were myriad men of God who served their age well, the facts are plain for all to see. To cite just a few great names: St. Barre influenced Mahon, King of Munster (950), who held fast to the old Catholic tradition in Dane-infested Ireland, and while St. Colmóc spread the faith in the Hebrides, St. Dunstan (925-988) ran a gospel course in England. Olaf Tryggvason (995-1000) spread the faith in Scandinavia: "Olaf," runs the old saga, "when he became King, sayeth he will bring about the christening of all Norway. . . ." The influence of scholars like St. Eric (d. 924) and other monks brought Olaf (Lap king) 993-1024, into the true fold; still

### *Saint Bernard and the Tenth Century*

another Olaf (Skotkonung), King of Sweden was converted in 1001, through the example of his father, Eric, a strenuous battler for Christianity. The Danish monarchy entered a new epoch in 935 when it accepted Christianity in the reign of Harold Bluetooth (950-986), a tribute to the unsung mission work of Benedictine monks. Brave initial attempts failed to bring the truth to the Wends, those fierce Slavic tribes north and east of Germany; but Boleslaus II (967) and Stephen (997) evangelized the savage Magyars, an Asiatic horde who had overturned the Kingdom of Moravia; and very soon after that the Gospel was carried to Poland. There was hope for the Russians when St. Olga, who ruled the land for twenty years, strove to win her pagan people to Christ. This daughter of a grand duke received Baptism in 945 during a visit to Constantinople. Though her son refused to embrace the faith, her grandson Vladimir received that great grace in 988, and the road was open to the evangelization of Russia. Most impressive, too, and most hopeful of all was the conversion of Rollo, the Sea Rover, by the Archbishop of Rouen. The onetime war-lord died in 917 and Normandy quickly became a thriving nation whose people proved the most progressive in all Europe. It is impossible to miss seeing in all this the preservative force of God, holding His Church together.



# Saint Edward the Confessor

SANS PEUR ET SANS REPROCHE

# SAINT EDWARD AND THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

<i>Emperors</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
HENRY II (Saxon), 1002-1024	Christianity in Greenland 1000	SYLVESTER II, 1003 JOHN XVII, 1003 JOHN XVIII, 1004-1009 SERGIUS IV, 1009-1012 BENEDICT VIII, 1012-1024 JOHN XIX, 1024-1033
	Normans astir in northern France 1000	
	Odilo rules Cluny 1000	
	Saxons massacre Danes in England 1003	
	Birth of Edward, the Confessor 1003	
FRANCONIAN EMPERORS CONRAD II (The Salic), 1024-1039	Birth of Peter Damien, Reformer 1007	BENEDICT IX, 1033-1044
	Edward and Alfred in Normandy 1012	
	St. Romauld founds the Camoldolese 1015	
	Canute rules England and Norway 1016	
	Birth of William the Conqueror 1027	
HENRY III (The Black), 1039-1056	Death of Fulbert of Chartres 1028	GREGORY VI, 1044-1046 CLEMENT II, 1046-1047 DAMASUS II, -1048 ST. LEO IX, 1049-1054
	Growth of Norman power 1030	
	Anselm, Father of the Schoolmen 1033	
	King Stephen spreads gospel in Hungary 1038	
	John Gaulberto founds Vallombrosians 1038	
HENRY IV, 1056-1106	Edward ascends the throne of England 1042	VICTOR II, 1055-1057 STEPHEN X, 1057-1058 NICHOLAS II, 1059-1061 ALEXANDER II, 1061-1073 ST. GREGORY VII, 1073-1085
	Lanfranc opens era of Scholasticism 1042	
	Birth of Hildebrand (Pope Gregory VII) 1048	
	Death of Emma, Queen Mother 1052	
	Normans raid southern Italy 1053	
RUDOLF OF SWABIA, 1077 (Rival) HERMAN OF LUXEMBURG, 1081 (Rival)	Normans enter England 1054	VICTOR III, 1086-1087 URBAN II, 1088-1099
	Border wars with Welsh 1055	
	Death of Edward the Confessor 1066	
	Battle of Hastings 1066	
	Abbey of Cluny completed 1066	
CONRAD OF FRANCONIA, (Rival) 1093	Stephen founds the Grandmontines 1076	PASCHAL II, 1099
	Birth of Abelard 1079	
	Bruno of Cologne founds Carthusians 1084	
	Toledo freed of Jew and Moslem 1085	
	Death of William the Conqueror 1087	
CONRAD OF FRANCONIA, (Rival) 1093	Birth of Bernard of Clairvaux 1091	PASCHAL II, 1099
	The Truce of God 1095	
	Robert founds Order of Frontevault 1095	
	The First Crusade 1095	
	Robert of Molesme founds Cistercians 1098	
	Jerusalem recovered from Turks 1099	

## SAINT EDWARD AND THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

### *A Parable Verified*

The story of what God did for His Church in this century can be told in the parable of the vineyard.

A vineyard belongs to my friend,  
On a hill that is fruitful and sunny;  
He digged it, and cleared it of stones  
And planted there vines that are choice  
And he looked to find grapes that are good,  
Alas, it bore grapes that are wild.<sup>1</sup>

Europe was just such a vineyard "grown over with thorns, its face covered with nettles, the stone wall thereof broken down." Nothing could restore the devastation save the Providence of Him Whom men had actually tried to exclude from His own world. "And He looked for justice, but behold! bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold! an outcry!" So the Divine Husbandman once again gave the orders — "Go out into My Vineyard! Dig it clear of stones! Plant vines that are choice!" The Holy Roman Empire had quite gone to ruin when eager laborers appeared on the scene: popes with their hands to the plow, saints with their mattocks to break the clods, scholars who enriched the fallow fields of knowledge. True, there were evil men in high places, the nobles still battled in old feudal fashion, Europe's plight of political misery was far from over and done with. For all that, the faithful laborers continued at their task till the evening. They dug diligently, uprooted the thorns and briars, strove to clear the field of stones. The result was that in place of

<sup>1</sup> Isaias V, 1-2

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

a field run wild, the vineyard showed sturdy growths, watched over until they could show forth a glorious harvest for Christendom.

One of these laborers, Edward the Confessor, accomplished his Heaven-assigned task in a sadly neglected corner of Europe. His mother was none other than great-granddaughter of Rollo, the Sea-Rover; his father Ethelred the Unready, the Saxon King of England. Our saint saw the light of day in 1003 on the soil of the pirate-ridden island. He was only a year old when his father engaged in a conflict with Sweyn, the Northman who rode roughshod over the land. No part of Europe suffered more widespread devastation; trees dead, crops ruined, fields untilled; towns, villages, monasteries reduced to ashes. Not till 1007 did Sweyn desist from ravaging every county in England and then only after he had received thirty-six thousand pounds of silver — Danegelt. Two years later the invaders returned to prey upon the kingdom; finally the Danish leader, Thurchil, sold his service to Ethelred for forty-eight thousand pounds. It is clear that from boyhood up, Edward saw action aplenty; and strangely enough, Saxon England and Normandy share the story of his eventful life on earth. They were years crowded with earth-shaking events, years destined to witness one of the greatest developments in history.

### *Every Inch a Prince*

The career of the great Confessor, spent in the midst of strife, offers amazing proof of God's loving kindness. His parents were an unnatural pair; Ethelred a hard, bitter man, both revengeful and capable of the blackest hatred; Emma of Normandy, a driving woman ever a thorn in her husband's flesh. One's heart goes out to the young prince at the thought of such a mother who was just a beautiful

### *Saint Edward and the Eleventh Century*

animal almost devoid of maternal feeling. Both parents paid dearly for their cruel selfishness; they not only forfeited the love and respect of their children but their earthly journey ended in ghastly failure. When Edward was only nine the King, hard pressed by his foes, sent Emma with her two sons to Normandy. The Normans were Gauls, short in stature, strongly built, the curious product of inter-marriage between Scandinavian sea-kings and Gallic nobles. Quickly the Saxon lad discovered that his kinsmen could be mean and quarrelsome, their cold eyes lighting up with a fierce anger at the prospect of a fight or even of a challenge. At first they must have been puzzled by Edward, so good, generous, sentimental; withal very firm, just, fearless! Their Viking ancestors had battled with earth and air, so had his! Their forebears had won the faith through brave missionaries, so had his! And he was able to join with the toughest in their hawking and swordplay; nay more, he could break a lance with the bravest. No one could envisage his secret world any more than they could glimpse his alert brain under the Norman helmet. None the less they must have admired his manner and conduct, his refusal to bow to low ideals.

For twenty-five years Edward dwelt an exile among his kinsmen. All those years he saw Norman power grow apace. They waged war and built castles without cease, as might be expected of a race with Viking and Gallo-Roman blood. Over the channel, however, things were vastly different; this, Edward knew from his father who in 1014 had fled to Normandy, hotly pursued by the Danes who laid waste his kingdom. Ethelred, ever the Unready, returned to fight it out but ended a calamitous reign two years later. An elder son Edmund (Ironsides) succeeded, and reigned seven months, after which Canute established himself easily over the whole realm. Was Edward surprised when the Dane sent over for

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

his mother in Normandy and promptly married her? Hardly, for the craft of this woman could devise ways of power that never entered into the hearts of those about her. Now that she had cast her lot with pirate Danes, it was certain that little thought would be given her sons by Ethelred — Arthur and Edward — who had a clear right to the English throne. On the death of Canute the succession was disputed by Harold, son of Canute, and Hardicanute, the latter a son of Canute and Emma. Harold took the kingdom north of the Thames while Hardicanute ruled the south. It looked as if Edward would remain forever the forgotten heir, even though in 1042 he returned to England and lived with his mother at the court of Hardicanute. He was learning much in those days, however; much that would stand him in good stead. More still, he trod the hard way of the Cross. Good soldier of Christ that he was, Edward, cool-headed and quick of vision, waited in patience, bravely facing agonizing circumstances. What, for instance, could have been more heart-breaking than the foul deed done his brother, Arthur? The young prince, invited by Danish plotters to visit England, found his soldiers trapped, himself a prisoner; they put out his eyes and he died as a result of this barbarous treatment. Emma, his heartless mother, accused of taking part in the plot, had to fly for her life to Bruges. By the irony of heaven, Harold ruled but four years, Hardicanute two, the latter dying in a drinking bout during a marriage festival. Then victory came for the neglected prince when the citizens of London unanimously summoned him to the throne of England.

#### *The Good King*

Edward at forty began his illustrious reign. It was, throughout, the rule of a peace-king who regarded his regal

## *Saint Edward and the Eleventh Century*

post as an almost priestly obligation, imposed by the sacred rites of consecration and anointment. Day after day he labored in this land which he found a waste, neither pruned nor weeded; in his eyes it was part of God's cherished plantation. If ever a monarch was God's man it was this Saxon saint who showed true homage to the Most High by ruling his kingdom in sincerity and justice all his days. Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that his whole intelligence and will were committed to the betterment of his native land. Three powerful chieftains, Godwin, Leofric and Siward held out, liable at any time to turn against Edward. They did not succeed, however, for the King had somehow swiftly won his way into the hearts of the people. Very soon his rule was seen to be one of severe justice; he drove the plotting Danish families out of the kingdom, seized the treasures of the perfidious Emma, the Queen Mother, but mercifully allowed her to live in Winchester unmolested until she died in 1052. Many Normans, attracted to England, were honored with Edward's friendship, but they presently fell out with native Saxon lords who bitterly resented their presence. Brawls and local strife ensued, nor did the situation improve when William, Duke of Normandy, paid his regal cousin a visit, was well received, and departed laden with rich gifts. By and large it grew increasingly clear that England was too small an island to hold Saxon and Norman, any more than Saxon and Dane. Besides, the ambitions of great families became a menace to the rule of the justice-loving monarch. At last Godwin, whose daughter Editha had become Edward's wife and Queen, rose in arms with other chiefs against his King. The generous sovereign forgave the traitor, restored him to court, but Sweyn, another plotter, was exiled for murder and sent on a pilgrimage to Palestine.

• The King himself, grateful for many blessings, planned to

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

make a pilgrim journey to Rome. But the Witan (royal council) demurred, fearing for his safety and knowing there was no heir to the throne. Pope Leo IX absolved him from his vow on condition, first, that the pilgrim moneys be given to the poor, next that he would build an abbey in honor of St. Peter. This Edward proceeded to do, setting apart a tithe of his revenue for the foundation of Westminster Abbey! In lieu of his own visit he sent bishops to represent the Anglo-Saxon Church in the Council summoned by Rome, and dutifully put into effect the canons condemning simony and the decree excommunicating Berengarius. These bishops made it their business to consult the Holy Father in regard to problems that perplexed the royal conscience; they revered their King as a conscientious ruler, aware of his deep responsibility toward religion and toward the people entrusted to him. This truly Catholic spirit of kingship shines out in his championship of learning no less than in his defence of the downtrodden. Love of letters still persisted in old England despite the Danes who had done their worst to destroy the Saxon cloisters. Amid the ruin on every side, Edward set about restoring long-abandoned monasteries; he also erected Evesham and Peterborough, famous centers of light. He gave orders that the person of a schoolmaster should be regarded as inviolable as that of a cleric. For the poor of his kingdom he showed deepest concern, staggered by the thought of the rags and suffering they had to endure. One day when he saw the pile of gold collected to buy off the Danes he ordered it to be dispersed among the needy. Never again would there be any Danegelt which for thirty-eight years had crushed Anglo-Saxon laborers to earth in their effort to meet the odious tax. On another occasion certain nobles mulcted their vassals of large sums which they presented to Edward as an offering from his loyal subjects. The King

## *Saint Edward and the Eleventh Century*

bluntly refused the proffered gift, for he saw through their plans, and ordered the money returned to the people who had been so cruelly pinched to provide it. How could the English do otherwise than worship a ruler who bravely spent himself in their behalf, shouldered every burden of state, and maintained a straight course amid the most difficult times. Happily the old bloody days began to disappear like the Danish wave, which, spent in strength, no longer threatened England's shores.

### *The Roman Scene*

Had the English King been able to visit the Eternal City he would have met a really great Pope. Leo IX (1049-1054) the royal-born Bruno, knew his Rome, having entered it as a simple pilgrim and later as a cavalry commander with the Franconian Emperor Conrad. Very soon he left no doubt in the minds of either friend or foe that he intended to rule the Church justly and fearlessly. With heavy burdens on his shoulders he faced squarely the challenge of Michael Cerularius, the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Eastern Church had drawn farther away from the papacy, and now its ecclesiastical ruler, following in the footsteps of an earlier rebel, Phocius, declared all Latin Catholics to be heretics. As if this were not enough, the quarrelsome Normans raided southern Italy in 1053, forcing the pontiff to engage them in battle. When his little army met defeat, the Pope was taken prisoner. Then came the miraculous turn. The Normans, impressed with the dignity, courage and holiness of the Vicar of Christ, threw themselves at his feet and swore to be his protectors ever after. Leo proved a true White Shepherd of Christendom who visited his flock in far-off pastures — he travelled the long way to Germany where he met Spaniards, Bretons, Franks, Irish and English. To Edward he sent

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

friendly missives, recognizing him for the God-sent ruler he was; but for his cousin William he had no such regard, and the proposed marriage of the wily Norman with Matilda of Flanders was strictly forbidden. The King of Hungary sought Leo's counsel, and the King of Scotland, Macbeth, begged his absolution for the murder of Duncan. Oh yes, this Pope could have told Edward the Confessor much, if only they had met vis-à-vis.

An evil half-century had just come to an end when Leo IX ascended the Chair of Peter, headed for many trials. How that Chair had been abused, threatened, stained with blood and infamy! The resulting situation could have been nothing but a heartbreak to this great Pope as he reviewed the past fifty years. All the dreams for a truly Holy Roman Empire had faded with the death of the Emperor Otto III who was shortly followed by the Pope. After Sylvester II (d. 1003), three good but not great men ruled the flock — John XVII, John XVIII and Sergius IV — then the return of chaos. A war-time pontiff, Benedict VIII, gathered a force and defeated the Saracens who had landed in Maremma; any thought of combating worse evils, simony and impurity, seemed to get nowhere. Rome continued stewing in the evil broth it had brewed. The same old scandals continued under Pope John XIX, while his successor, Benedict IX, committed the most dreadful simony of all time — the papal office was sold! By the providence of God, the next Pope, Gregory VII, proved to be a pious and good man who had by his side the Benedictine monk Hildebrand, destined to be one of the greatest Pontiffs of all time. Just now, however, the true Pope had his hands full — you see the sad spectacle of three contestants for the See of Rome, each guarded by his soldiery, and so panicky was the city, overrun by hoodlums and gangsters, that the German Emperor, Henry III, had

## *Saint Edward and the Eleventh Century*

to come south to restore order. The Teuton spears could not quell the riots until one Pope was summoned to answer for his crimes and promptly deposed, while Gregory VII had to be whisked away to Germany. Grim and terrific were those days; the Italian plotters still employed their poison-in-the-cup methods. And no sooner had Clement II, a German bishop, begun to rule behind the shields of yellow-haired northern warriors than he met a dreadful death; it was no secret that the hostile faction had poisoned the pontiff. His successor, Damasus II, did not live the year out. . . . All this Leo IX could undoubtedly have told the English King, for he was the one who had succeeded the short-lived Damasus.

### *Rule of Edward*

By this time the Normans had made themselves felt on the continent, but England was far away as ever from their greedy hands. Edward continued to govern his people with a loving kindness in return for which they would gladly have died to serve him. Indeed — this the Normans knew — they were ready to rise as a united nation at a word from the throne. Only one war did the peace-loving monarch wage in his long reign of twenty-four years. That was in 1039 when Duncan, King of Scotland, had been foully murdered by Macbeth, and his son, Malcolm, came straight to Edward as a fugitive. The just King sent an army to vindicate Malcolm's right, Macbeth was routed in Aberdeenshire, and the crown placed on the head of the rightful heir. True, there was the Welsh affair in 1055, when those quarrelsome bordermen interfered in a civil war, and Edward had to send Harold to drive out the plunderers. Yet when English soldiers overran Wales and the natives cried out for mercy, the King generously granted an armistice. Used to facing

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

unsurmountable obstacles, equipped only with the shield of truth and the breastplate of justice, he continued to rule, without fear and without reproach. This was not so simple in an England where the cry of the rebel, the plots of his own court, the treachery of toadlike satellites, surrounded him. By the grace of God, however, Edward met them, one and all, as he moved unafraid amidst his people, advancing ever onward and upward. And as the years went by, it was seen how miraculously he had cleared England of much that was bitter and cruel, shameful and abominable. Most significant of all, the laws he enacted were just — very just for that day, and no foreigner succeeded in interfering or hindering him from working for the salvation of his people. The Danes no longer rummaged through the land like rag-pickers, bent on gathering into their dirty sacks the treasure and booty of a kingdom. And though the Normans had grown stronger, building themselves many castles in England, the generous King still tolerated them. Admittedly there were among these kinsmen many men of learning and zeal, who more than made up for the gallant vagabonds answering the call to reckless adventure.

As Edward's life drew near to a close, those Normans from overseas grew daily in power. The treacheries of Godwin, on the other hand, brought down the world about his ears; he was outlawed with his five sons, and his daughter, Queen Edith, found herself driven from court. "Then," said the chronicler, "put away the king the lady who had been consecrated his queen, and caused to be taken from her all which she possessed, in land, and in gold, and in silver, and in all things, and delivered her to his sister at Wherwall."<sup>2</sup> The Bishop of London had to be expelled and Edward's Norman chaplain, William, given his place; the Norman bishop, Rudolf, received the abbey of Abingdon. Thus the new-

<sup>2</sup> Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

## *Saint Edward and the Eleventh Century*

comers continued to reap rich favors, while disgruntled Saxon nobles hinted that Duke William had been promised the succession. Albeit the King held the reins, put down opposition through his great earls, Harold and Siward, and merited more and more the high regard of his people. At this time, says William of Malmesbury, "Edward was becoming of stature, his beard and hair milk-white, his countenance florid, fair throughout his whole person, and also his form of admirable proportion. He was a man by choice devoted to God, and lived the life of an angel in the administration of his kingdom. To the poor and to the stranger more especially foreigners, and men of religious orders, he was kind in invitation, munificent in presents, and constantly inciting the monks of his own country to imitate their holiness." In 1066 at Christmas the beloved King held his court at Westminster, and on Holy Innocents' Day caused the great cathedral to be consecrated, little dreaming that very soon it would be his final resting place. The story is told that as Edward lay dying he suddenly revived and exclaimed, "Almighty God, if it be not an illusion but a true vision which I have beheld, grant me strength to tell it to those who are by. I saw just now standing by me two monks whom I had seen in Normandy in my youth, and knew to have lived most religiously and died most Christianly. These men assured me that they were sent to me with a message from God and proceeded as follows: Forasmuch as the princes, dukes, bishops and abbots of England are not the servants of God but of the devil, therefore God will within a year and a day deliver this kingdom into the hand of the enemy; and this land shall be wholly overrun with demons!"

### *The Norman Invasion*

Directly the great King had passed the portal of a fuller life, the report went forth that he had appointed Harold,

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

son of Earl Godwin, as his successor. But no sooner was Harold proclaimed ruler than he found himself in the thick of civil war and the threat of peril from abroad. The Duke of Normandy claimed that the new King had sworn that he, William, should succeed Edward, which Harold hotly denied saying that the oath had been extorted by force. One day in October, 1066, word came that the overseas claimant was landing with sixty thousand men on the Sussex coast. The Norman doubtless would stop at nothing to attain his ends, and the Saxon was equally determined to resist him to the death. Their two armies met at Senlac, nine miles from Hastings where the Saxons prepared for the onslaught of the Norman cavalry. When the clash came, the ancient battle-axe of the Islanders made itself felt in the deadly infighting; and though the bloody engagement continued all day long, the smaller army held its own until Harold, shot through the eye, had to be carried from the field. With the King out of the way, his brothers dead, and all the Saxon nobles slain, the Normans charged irresistibly. At the rise of the moon a thin bloody remnant of the Saxon army fled through the woods, pursued by the invaders many of whom lost their lives in the swamps and ditches. That the Normans paid dearly for England is evident from the fact that one-fourth of their numbers fell on the field of Hastings. So cruel was the Conqueror that he ordered the body of King Harold to be buried on the beach, adding with a sneer: "He guarded the coast while he was alive, let him continue to guard it after death." With William seated on the throne it looked as if Edward the Confessor's vision was not so illusory, after all. The Conqueror became the Universal Landlord of England, a hard taskmaster who confiscated Saxon lands which he gave over to his Norman followers. Listen to the lament of the Saxon monk of St. Albans: "The

## *Saint Edward and the Eleventh Century*

lords of England, who since Brutus' days had never known the yoke of slavery, were now scorned, derided, and trodden under foot; they were compelled to shave their beards and clip their flowing locks in the Norman fashion: casting aside their horns and wonted drinking-vessels, their feasts and carousals, they were compelled to submit to new laws. Wherefore many of the English nobles refused the yoke of slavery and fled with all their households to live by plunder in the woods, so that scarce any man could go safely abroad in his own neighbourhood; the houses of all peaceful folk were armed like a besieged city with bows and arrows, bills and axes, clubs and daggers and iron forks; the doors were barred with locks and bolts. The master of the house would say prayers as if on a tempest-tost bark; as doors or windows were closed, men said *Benedicite*, and *Dominus* echoed reverently in response; a custom which lasted down into our own days (probably about 1150 A.D.)." The old Anglo-Saxon law, none the less, stood its ground, and was amended or added to as time went on. But no papal legate was allowed to enter England except with William's express permission; even the bishops were forbidden to open letters from Rome until they had passed through the Norman monarch's hands.

### *Labors of the Church*

England was, of course, a far-off corner of the European vineyard. But elsewhere the Church had to meet equally difficult opposition. The one power that could unify Christendom was the papacy; the task of the papacy was to curb the widespread lust, avarice and injustice, and to diminish the ill-gotten power of secular rulers over things spiritual. If, for example, there was to be freedom in papal elections, the Emperor and the Roman factions must keep their hands off. Pope Nicholas II (1059-1061) went right to work on

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

this all-important issue. By a decree of a Roman synod in 1059 the choice of a Pope was placed in the hands of the College of Cardinals, cardinal-bishops being empowered to take the initiative. The synod further ruled that the Church no longer acknowledged the immense influence wielded by the German Emperor; a most potent weapon was swept from his hands. Old complications persisted, however, due to the schemes of ambitious rulers who made bishops into counts or dukes of their diocese, then used them as catspaws in royal intrigues. Still worse, many venal churchmen, belying their high calling, betrayed their Holy Mother by joining sides in private wars. These wars, which had flared up endlessly under the feudal system, were now vigorously opposed, the Church denying their very principle, and enjoining on all war-makers "the Truce of God" — a cessation of armed conflict from sunset of Wednesday until Monday — to commemorate the days of Christ's arrest, trial, crucifixion and victory over death!

On the death of Pope Nicholas II, the College of Cardinals elected Alexander II, thus challenging the opposition of the Italian and the imperial parties. Acts such as bribing officials and intimidating honest men continued as of yore. To live in a city of plotters and poisoners was not easy, yet Alexander carried on for twelve years, battling against powerful prelates guilty of simony, and courageously withstanding high-born schemers. It was well for him that he had two great churchmen, Hildebrand and Peter Damian, close at hand. They initiated many reforms in the face of foes who would gladly have wiped them off the face of the earth. When the young, uncurbed Emperor, Henry IV, showed signs of evil life Alexander promptly reprovved him and refused even to consider his request for a divorce. Henry, as we shall see, was to be the chronic worry of the papacy, while year after year

## *Saint Edward and the Eleventh Century*

ill-luck and failure dogged his path. The affair of the Milan archbishopric precipitated the most bitter of all conflicts. Who was the lawful incumbent? The Emperor angrily contended for his man, the allies of the papacy proved adamant for another. It was clear that unless the situation was justly handled there could be little hope for order and peace. So Hildebrand journeyed to Milan as papal legate and laid down the law at a time when Germany was still divided. Henry was now in serious straits, Saxon nobles having threatened his liberty, if not his life. The fact is, the German Emperor could never be trusted, and his backers were just as bad. One of the last acts of the dying pontiff was to hurl the ban of the Church against these perfidious councillors. On April 21, 1073, Alexander, weary unto death after a whole decade of endless strife, went to his reward. Who was to be the next Pope?

### *The Pope of the Century*

Hildebrand, returning from the funeral of Alexander, was horrified to hear the cries of the Roman populace, "Let Hildebrand be Pope! Blessed Peter hath chosen Hildebrand!" A year passed before the most self-effacing man of that age was ordained and consecrated Bishop of Rome, taking the name of Gregory VII. He did not deem himself worthy of the priesthood, this little bow-legged man, son of a carpenter, who spoke with a stammer, yet possessed almost unbelievable dynamic energy. No man in that day exercised so vital an influence on the development of religion and the achievement of law and order. Nothing daunted, the sagacious Pope sent word to the Emperor regarding his election, warning him to clean his house, for the German court was infamous for its simony and moral disorder. Two years later, Gregory could write to his friend, Hugh, Abbot of Cluny: "Wherever I

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

turn my eyes — to the west, or to the north, or to the south — I find everywhere Bishops who have obtained their office in an irregular way, whose lives and conversations are strangely at variance with their sacred calling; and who go through their duties not for the love of Christ but for motives of worldly gain. . . .” Characteristically the great reformer took action without delay — “Whoever in the future,” he declared before the Roman Synod, “receives a bishopric or an abbacy from the hands of a layman, shall not be regarded as a bishop or an abbot. Similarly if an Emperor, a duke, a marquis, or a count dares to confer an investiture in connection with a bishopric or any other ecclesiastical office, he shall be cut off from the communion of Blessed Peter.”

The Pope, ever insistent on obedience to the Holy See, fought for truth and justice. For twelve long years he strove to preserve the security of the Church, seeing that the supernatural character of Christendom was at stake. As might be expected, Henry IV whose ego was far from deflated, resisted him to the hilt; he summoned his episcopal puppets who went into a diet at Worms. There they proceeded to “depose” Gregory while Henry sent him the following message: “Henry, King, not by usurpation but by the will of God, to Hildebrand who is no longer pope but a false monk. Having been condemned by the sentence of our bishops and by our sentence, vacate the place which you have usurped.” At the Lateran, Gregory calmly read the outrageous letter, then made reply, “I deprive Henry the King, son of Henry the Emperor, of all authority in the Kingdom of the Teutons and in Italy. I release all Christians from their oaths of fidelity sworn to him or that they shall swear to him. . . . I bind him with the chain of anathema. . . .” The result was amazing, terrific! No armed forces could have accomplished what the papal excommunication achieved. Many of the

## *Saint Edward and the Eleventh Century*

imperial vassals, disgusted with Henry's vile plots and evil life, turned against him, and the once all-powerful ruler found himself bound for the unknown, without friends or allies. When he learned that his own nobles had invited Gregory to come to Augsburg to sit in judgment upon their King, that was the last stroke. All his pleas were in vain; they declared that he must forfeit the throne unless he obtained the Pope's absolution within a year and a day. Then an extraordinary thing happened. The proud Henry, rather than meet the Pope as an ally of his own princes, decided to leave Germany, go to Italy and throw himself at the feet of the Pope. As a penitent pilgrim he made his way to Canossa, Matilda's great domain in Tuscany, where Gregory was a guest. The migrant Emperor stood barefooted in the snow, weeping and pleading before the rigidly closed gates of the fortress. Was he only pretending a reconciliation, shedding crocodile tears because he was so thoroughly beaten? Time will tell. Anyhow, after three days, Gregory, moved with mercy, admitted him into the castle, and absolved him on condition that he appease those princes who had justly accused him of his crimes!

The cause of the Church had been won, but only for a little while. Henry's repentance proved short-lived; presently he was annulling elections and investing whomsoever he pleased. And as his evil life kept pace with his perfidy, the princes rebelled and raised Rudolf of Swabia to the kingship. Henry's woes piled up when the decree against investiture was renewed in 1080 and Pope Gregory again excommunicated him "for raising his heel against the Church and striving to subjugate it." Henry got together a group of anti-papal German bishops who met in Synod at Brixton, formally "deposed" Gregory and went so far as to appoint as his successor Clement III. Then the diehard, in a sudden burst

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

of power, led his army down to Rome to install the anti-Pope "made in Germany." The papacy was again in imminent peril, what with Rudolf of Swabia slain in battle, Robert Guiscard too late on the scene, and that other powerful Norman, William the Conqueror, an uninterested looker-on. For three years Henry tried in vain to enter Rome, while the Pope took shelter in the Castle of St. Angelo. Not until he was betrayed by the Roman nobles, and abandoned by the retreating Normans, did Gregory fly to Salerno. Once in command of the city, Henry, mad with his moment of victory, proclaimed Clement III Pope and then, on Easter, 1084, received the imperial crown from his candidate. The heroic and incorruptible Gregory died soon after this; his last words were: "I have loved justice and hated iniquity, therefore I die in exile." It looked as if the victory of the temporal power had all but nullified his life work. But no. Not at all! For he had taught the aggressive Emperor a lesson never to be forgotten; also, Canossa broke the rebellious spirit of the bishops. Even though Henry outlived the century, he reaped the reward of a gnarled, misspent life. Driven from his throne, the "lone wolf" tried to stage a come-back but died in the endeavor. Twice they dug up his body by the order of the Church and it was fully five years before the curse of Rome was removed from his ashes.

### *Wings of Dawn*

Dark days indeed, yet all this time there was steady growth in knowledge and holiness. Indeed, the eleventh century was an era of reform and church purification. Hope went hand in hand with zeal to bring about changes nothing short of dramatic. The Schoolmen — Lanfranc in Normandy, Anselm in England — applied reason to systematize and vindicate theology — "faith seeking for knowledge; and

## *Saint Edward and the Eleventh Century*

philosophy rapidly became the handmaid of religion." Far more important was the spirit of reform such as animated Edward the Confessor, Leo VIII and Gregory IX. In England, for instance, Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, withstood to the face William II who tried to seize the revenues of the Church, whereupon the King ordered that he be tried for treason. But the English bishops refused to depose their primate; and the undaunted Anselm challenged the nobles of the land: "If any man pretend that I have violated the faith which I have sworn to the king, because I will not reject the authority of the Bishop of Rome, let him come forward and he will find me ready to answer him as I ought. . . ." Such was the spirit that began to renew the face of Europe. And as the charity of many waxed warm, all sorts and conditions of men sought true life in old monasteries while new orders were founded by great saints. An incident in the old chronicle pictures this great quickening and the consequent change for the better.

A certain Knight named Waleman, desiring to become a monk, rode to the abbey of Hemmenrode on his war-horse, and in full armour; in full armour he rode into the cloister, and (as I have been told by our older monks who were present) the porter led him down the middle of the choir, under the eyes of the whole community, who marvelled at this new form of conversion. The Knight then offered himself upon the altar of the Blessed Virgin, and, putting off his armour, took the habit of religion in that same monastery, thinking it fit to lay down his earthly knighthood in the very spot where he purposed to become a Knight of the Holy Ghost. Here, when the days of his novitiate were past, he chose in his humility to become a lay-brother; and here he still lives, a good and religious man.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Caes. Heist, I, 45

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

John Gualberto was obviously that sort of knight. On Good Friday in 1030 he tracked his brother's slayer into a church and was on the point of despatching him when, looking up to the great crucifix, his eyes were held by the living eyes of Christ. The dagger dropped from his trembling hand as he fled in panic down the aisle, aware of how close he had come to murder. Eight years later John, the penitent, founded the Order of Vallambrosia whose monks aspired to the most severe life and did much to make up for the prevailing monastic laxity.

The magnificent reforms of Cluny, remember, gained ground rapidly in the most out-of-the-way places. New bonds of union were forged by the "Customs of Cluny," observed in hundreds of old Benedictine monasteries, now returned to the spirit of their sainted founder. There were congregations of houses under a central abbot, and a system of visitation under the Abbot of Cluny which looked to the strict observance of the old rule. Step by step with these developments, the Camaldolese monks (founded by St. Romuald in 1012) extended their holy hermit activities far and wide. In 1084 Bruno, a high-born scholar, casting wealth and power to the winds, founded the Carthusians in the wilderness near Grenoble. His monks lived as hermits, and "La Chartreuse" became a great spiritual center. Robert of Molesme, born 1027, built an abbey in Molesme, but when his monks grew lax, the brave leader left them, and erected a reformed monastery in Burgundy, which was called Cîteaux. His Cistercians, the greatest of whom was Bernard, loomed large as they followed the rule of St. Benedict in all its austerity. Another Robert, de Forlande, became a Benedictine; established a reform in 1043 and built the monastery of Chaise-Dieu which presently counted two hundred other monasteries in its congregation. These brave

### *Saint Edward and the Eleventh Century*

monks bore the heat and burden of the day, laboring silently in the most abandoned wastelands of the Vineyard. Nor may we omit the name of Peter Damian, so staunch and far-seeing, who by the side of Hildebrand initiated and promoted the most vital developments. Both men backed Popes in their efforts to put an end to simony and the immorality of the clergy. They brought Canon Law to bear on the culprits and sought to purify the Church of the blackest stains. They worked as one for the advancement of papal authority, Peter as Cardinal Bishop of Ostia, Hildebrand as the humble monk who had contacts in all Europe. The three Popes that followed Gregory VII — Victor III, Urban II, and Paschal II — witnessed the beautiful flowering of monastic life. At the century-end the Church could further rejoice when brave knights of the First Crusade recovered Jerusalem from the Turks.



# Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

FATHER OF WESTERN MYSTICISM

# SAINT BERNARD AND THE TWELFTH CENTURY

<i>Emperors</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
HENRY IV, 1106 HENRY V, 1106-1125	Bernard at school in Chatillon-sur-Seine 1100 Birth of Arnold of Brescia 1100	PASCHAL II, 1099-1118
	Bernard enters Abbey of Cîteaux 1113 Bernard founds Clairvaux 1116 Cistercian reform under Bernard 1116	GELASIUS II, 1118-1119 CALLISTUS II, 1119-1124 HONORIUS II, 1124-1130 INNOCENT II, 1130-1143
	Pomeranians converted by Otto 1120 Ninth General Council 1123	
LOTHAIR II, 1125-1138	Quarrel over investitures 1130	
CONRAD III, 1138-1152	Bernard preaches in Burgundy 1134 Bernard peacemaker for the Pope 1137 Conrad the Hohenstaufen vs. the Papacy 1138 St. Malachy visits Bernard 1139 Tenth General Council 1139 Death of Peter Abelard 1142	
	Arnold of Brescia appears in Rome 1143	CELESTINE II, 1143-1144 LUCIUS II, 1144-1145 BL. EUGENE III, 1145-1153
	Building of Chartres Cathedral 1144 Bernard preaches Second Crusade 1145 Second Crusade 1147-1149 Malachy dies in arms of Bernard 1148 Guelph vs. Ghibelline in Germany 1150 Bernard dies at Clairvaux 1153 Frederick quells Lombards 1154	ANASTASIUS IV, 1153-1154
FREDERICK BARBAROSSA, 1152-1190	Arnold of Brescia executed 1155 Pope Adrian lays Rome under interdict Death of Peter the Lombard	ADRIAN IV (English Pope), 1154-1159 ALEXANDER III, 1159-1181
	Frederick's forces stricken in Italy 1167 Birth of St. Dominic 1170 Martyrdom of St. Thomas à Becket 1170 Saladin rules Egypt 1171 Frederick again invades Italy 1176 Eleventh General Council 1179 Hildegarde, Prophetess of the Rhine 1179	
	Birth of St. Francis of Assisi 1182	LUCIUS III, 1181-1185 URBAN III, 1185-1187 GREGORY VIII, 1187 CLEMENT III, 1187-1191 CELESTINE III, 1191-1198
	Jerusalem captured by Saladin 1187	
HENRY VI, 1190-1197	Third Crusade under way 1189 Death of Barbarossa 1190 Richard I returns to England 1192 Birth of Albert the Great 1193	
PHILIP, 1197 OTTO IV, 1197 (Rivals)	Unrest and violence at century end 1199	INNOCENT, 1198-1216

## SAINT BERNARD AND THE TWELFTH CENTURY

### *Way of the Cross*

Europe had donned the armor of faith and entered the spirit of the Crusades. The dawn of this century saw Christians in possession of the Holy Places after decisively defeating the Turks. It also glimpsed a boy at school, named Bernard, whose sixty-three years of giant activity would exercise lasting influence on Church and Empire. This amazing character, destined to be immortalized in history, came of an extraordinary family. His father, Tecelin, was a powerful vassal of the Duke of Burgundy; his mother, Elizabeth, a love-happy person, farseeing and affectionate. At the age of nine the Burgundian lad was sent to school at Chatillon-sur-Seine where, among the sons of the upper classes, he studied language and literature, poetry and the Sacred Scriptures. The tumult and the shouting of the First Crusade scarce abated, these boys of the Middle Ages showed themselves as familiar with visor, sword and shining armor as our modern youth with bats, balls and boxing-gloves. Many a story they told of Christians waylaid and enslaved by the Moslem, whose crescent ever threatened the true Cross. Older pupils could remember hearing about Peter the Hermit who, at the call of Pope Urban, went through north Italy and France, rousing the soldiers of the Cross to go forth and take the Holy Places from the Turks. "God wills it!" was the fiery monk's battle cry. War there must be, he proclaimed, yes, war to the hilt, else the infidel would continue to torture pilgrims and desecrate the Holy Places. With despatch the first Crusaders had done their work; they then

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

founded the Kingdom of Jerusalem, many remaining to plant the good seed in Syria and Palestine.

Deep in Bernard's schoolboy heart flamed the spirit of Holy War. Did his companions dream that Tecelin's son would one day consecrate himself to the cause of God? The very year he entered school, the summer of 1099, the playground fairly rang with the joyous news of the capture of Jerusalem. And how his young soul must have yearned to put on shining armor and join the soldiers of the Cross. All the more, when he heard stories about Constantinople, Nice, and Antioch, which burned into his brain. Add to that, the letters he read, such as this one of Peter of Blois to his wife:

You may be sure, dearest, that my messenger leaves me before Antioch safe and unharmed, through God's grace. We have been advancing continuously for twenty-three weeks toward the home of Our Lord Jesus. You may know for certain, my beloved, that I have now twice as much of gold and silver and of many other kinds of riches as when I left Nicea. We fought a great battle with the perfidious Turks, and by God's aid, conquered them. Thence, continuously pursuing the wicked Turks, we drove them as far as the great river Euphrates.

The bolder of them hastened by forced marches, night and day, in order to be able to enter the royal city of Antioch before our approach. The whole army of God, learning of this, gave due praise and thanks to the omnipotent Lord. Hastening with great joy to Antioch, we besieged it, and very often had many conflicts with the Turks, and seven times with the citizens of Antioch, and with the innumerable troops coming to its aid. In all these seven battles, by the aid of the Lord God, we conquered, and most assuredly killed a vast host of them. Many of our brethren and followers were killed also, and their souls were borne to the joys of Paradise.

When the emir of Antioch — that is, its prince and lord — perceived that he was hard pressed by us, he sent his son to the prince

## *Saint Bernard and the Twelfth Century*

who holds Jerusalem, and to the prince of Damascus, and to three other princes. These five emirs, with 12,000 picked Turkish horsemen, suddenly came to aid the inhabitants of Antioch. We, ignorant of all this, had sent many of our soldiers away to the cities and fortresses; for there are 165 cities and fortresses throughout Syria which are in our power. But a little while before they reduced the city, we attacked them at three leagues' distance with 700 soldiers. God fought for us, His faithful. On that day we conquered them and killed an innumerable multitude; and we carried back to the army more than two hundred of their heads, in order that the people might rejoice on that account . . .

Those "brown wolves" paid dearly for all the tears and blood, the hunger, thirst and sudden death they had brought upon Christian men and women. But when would the eager youth see service? How soon could he take part in the conflict of Christianity against Moslemism?

### *Trials of a Young Knight*

At nineteen Bernard left school and returned to his father's castle near Dijon. Ten years had brought many changes in the outstandingly brilliant student. He was grown up now, exceedingly attractive, vigorously and joyously alive. A violent temptation of impurity assailed the handsome youth but he escaped sin by fighting the evil foe to a finish and gaining a most important victory over self. Alert to subdue his lower nature, Bernard already showed a measure of the heroic stuff of which he was made. The next great trial that befell him was the loss of his wonderful mother, a terrible shock to all the family, especially to Bernard who loved her with a deep, abiding love. Her going seemed to rob him of all joy, happiness, almost of life itself. He was twenty now and living in an atmosphere of war when he received the call of Heaven to be a soldier of Jesus Christ. It happened one

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

day while he was on his way to visit his brothers, who were in the battle area on the side of the Duke of Burgundy. As he rode along deep in thought the world with its lust for war, pride of place and perpetual unrest seemed to pass before him as a vain show, and suddenly a voice sounded in the chaces of his heart, "Come to Me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you; take My yoke upon you, and you shall find rest to your souls." The living words of Christ struck home and a heavenly longing took possession of Bernard, thrilled as never before, even to the very marrow of his bones. He drew up and dismounted before the door of the next church on the road: all a-tremble, he entered and, prostrate before the altar, prayed as never before, raising his tear-dimmed eyes to heaven, and pouring his heart like water before the face of the Lord. His answer came when a deep calm fell on his soul, while the breath of God renewed his very being. Afire with love, he consecrated his existence to God, joyfully accepting the yoke of Him Who is meek and humble of heart.

The decision Bernard made that day, a heroic choice, altered his whole life. He resolved to bury his virgin sword, give up the career of knighthood, and become a monk. However, that was far from easy in view of the strenuous opposition of his old father, his battle-trying brothers and his lovely little sister, Humbeline, so dear to his heart. All of them used every ruse they could think of, every argument in their quivers to dissuade him from taking such a step. The outlook was decidedly difficult, but an uncle who was both soldier and nobleman stood by Bernard through thick and thin despite the family protests. After a time he won the good will of his younger brothers, Andrew and Bartholomew, together with the older, Guido. But Gerard proved so bitter that Bernard paid him a visit in camp where he was com-

## *Saint Bernard and the Twelfth Century*

manding troops about to besiege Grancey. The reception his favorite brother accorded Bernard was far from fraternal, even friendly: there was scorn, abuse, contempt as the flame of his anger mounted higher. "I know," said Bernard laying his hand on the shoulder of the swashbuckling Gerard, "yes, I well know, that nothing but adversity will open thy mind to the truth. Well, the day will come when this spot which I touch will be pierced by a lance, which will thus open a way for the entrance of these words into thy heart, from which thou now turnest away in disdain. . . ." A few days later, during the siege, Gerard was seriously wounded by an arrow in the very spot his brother had touched. For days the doughty young knight hung between life and death, so cruel was the wound, so fierce the fever. There was little hope until after the arrival of a messenger sent by the grief-stricken Bernard. "Thy wound," the missive read, "is not unto death, but unto life." And so it came to pass; years later Gerard himself entered religion. All this hectic time, remember, Bernard, a good soldier of Jesus Christ, could only watch, pray and fight in his innermost heart against the world, the flesh and the devil.

### *The Young Monk*

1113 stands out as a great date in the history of the century. In that year, Bernard with thirty young men knocked at the gates of Cîteaux, begging for admission into the ranks of the white monks. It was the bravest, highest adventure they ever attempted, for the Cistercian rule required not only physical courage but the strong thews of the spirit. "Our food is meagre," writes one abbot, "our clothing of the rougher sort. Our drink is from the running brook, our sleep is often upon our book. And stretched under our wearied limbs is a mat that is anything but soft. . . . When the bell sounds,

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

even though sleep were far sweeter, we must rise. There is no place for self will, no time for ease or dissipation." The whole life of these men of God pivoted on a burning love for Our Lord, a single aim to "put on" Christ, and a desire to follow Him through life's desert. These things Bernard displayed from the start, and so great was his spiritual progress that after three years his superiors decided to send the young monk out on a campaign for God. The year 1115 saw him at work in the gorges and rocky cliffs of Vallée d'Absinthe (the wild Valley of Bitterness), building the monastery of Clairvaux. His monks served under a most severe-soldier discipline, the silence of the place broken only by the chanting of the divine office or the sounds of their labor. "To judge from their outward appearance," said Peter of Roya, "their looks, their poor clothes, they appear a race of fools without speech or sense." Maybe, but they were fools for the sake of Christ, and it was not long before the sound of their works was heard through Europe. Henry, the son of Louis IV, on visiting the monastery fell under the holy influence of Bernard and declared his intention to become a white monk. His henchman, Andrea of Paris, left Clairvaux cursing and swearing at the folly of the prince, but before dawn he returned to follow in the footsteps of his liege lord. Such was the energy, eloquence and example, in short the supernatural power of the Abbot of Clairvaux "that mothers hid their sons, wives their husbands, companions their friends, lest they should be led away captive."

A visitor to Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, seeking out the amazing monk, found him "ill at the time from the excess of his mortifications, lying in a cell without the enclosure: like unto a leper's hut at the crossways, and when he in his turn had welcomed us joyously and we began to ask how he fared, he smiled upon us with that generous smile of his and

## *Saint Bernard and the Twelfth Century*

said 'most excellently.' " His father, Tecelin, and his knightly brothers meanwhile had joined the Cistercians, and assisted him in the work of the great abbey. But his beautiful sister, Humbeline, the social butterfly in pursuit of life's vanities, held off stubbornly from the life of religion. Ever since she had married a brother of the Duchess of Lorraine, Humbeline had become a woman of the world. It seemed tragically ridiculous to her that the family of Tecelin, the great vassal, should have gone over to God, Bernard in particular, with all his personal and intellectual charm. One day an overmastering impulse seized and fairly drove the vain creature to visit her beloved brother. On arriving at the monastery, she ordered the sun-browned lay brother to summon the Abbot of Clairvaux. Would he see her, she must have asked herself, or would he keep his cell with that iron cross of his? The haughty command went unanswered, for Bernard from behind the cloister door beheld her approach. So disgusted was he with her display of pride in dress and equipage that he simply could not make up his mind to greet her. Then it was that Humbeline, heartbroken, quailed at the very thought of being repulsed and burst out with: "I know I am a sinner; but did not Jesus Christ die for such persons as I am? If my brother despises my body, let not the servant of God despise my soul. Let him come, let him command, let him order — I will obey him; I will do whatever he desires me." Suddenly the postern-gate swung wide and her brothers, headed by Bernard, greeted the repentant worldling. The abbot took her aside to give her a good talk during which he lovingly recalled the memories of their mother, and urged Humbeline to follow *her* rule of married life. Now, indeed, was the proud lady shorn of her pride of life, nay more, won over completely by the grace of God. She returned to her castle a different woman, ever mindful of her brother's coun-

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

sels. Later, on the death of her husband, she left the world to enter a convent where she lived in the odor of sanctity.

### *Call to Arms*

The Abbot of Clairvaux already an acknowledged theologian and a wise counsellor, was equally famous for his humility, meekness and kindness. It was said, and truly, that he feared no man, yet revered all men. If the occasion demanded, Bernard was ready to speak to Pope or King with equal freedom. For example, he forthrightly warned Pope Eugene III against the danger to the papacy from the misconduct of any incumbent in that highest office in the world. Again, he protested to King Louis VII in these sharp words: "From whom, but from the Devil, can I say that this policy of yours proceeds? Whatsoever it may please you to do with your own realm and crown and soul, we, as sons of the Church, cannot hold our peace in face of the insults and contempt with which our Mother is trodden underfoot." Before long the white monk found himself at war with the false teachers of the age. One of these was Peter Abelard, a Breton, easily the most brilliant theological teacher of the twelfth century, though vanity, ill-temper and reckless language marred his genius. As early as 1115 while Bernard prayed at Cîteaux, Abelard's school in Paris had become famous, attended by thousands of pupils. His career was lust-spoilt by unfortunate conduct with Heloise, a young girl for whom he had a passionate attachment. The affair over, Abelard went into a desert place near Nogent only to be followed by hundreds of eager students who sat at his feet. He taught them that all truths should be challenged, that a thing could be true in theology and false in philosophy, that one could believe a thing, proved untrue. Such bold theories, together with a brazen flouting of authority, got

## *Saint Bernard and the Twelfth Century*

him into trouble with the austere heroic abbots of that day. Bernard, whose piety was shocked, attacked the adventurous thinker and a duel ensued which made plain two conflicting currents of thought — the new rationalism vs. traditional authority. In a letter to Pope Innocent II the white monk declared: "Peter Abelard is trying to make void the merit of Christian faith, when he deems himself able by human reason to comprehend God altogether. . . . The man is great in his own eyes." At the Council of Sens in 1140 the Abbot of Clairvaux confronted Abelard who was charged with heresy. And when the erratic teacher appealed to the Pope the sentence was sustained in Rome; after that he turned to Cluny where his last days were spent with Peter the Venerable within the walls of the monastery.

Next in the lists came Arnold of Brescia, a priest who had been a pupil of Abelard. This fanatical reformer held out for gospel simplicity on the part of all the clergy, proclaiming that all properties must be returned to the State. His gospel words appealed to some, but the bitterness of his attacks alienated others, nobles and prelates in particular. The fact that Arnold practiced the ascetic life covered the more dangerous fact that he was a crooked thinker. Bernard, however, saw through him, declaring, "He neither eats nor drinks, but with the Devil hungers and thirsts after souls." That the abbot was right presently appeared when the wild visionary became a menace to civil authority, and continued to display a burning hatred of Pope and bishops alike. As soon as the Lateran Council condemned Arnold, he made his way from one country to another, finally arriving in Rome where the Republican forces received the angry exile with open arms. Their devotion to this brother-traveller was unbounded, since he so readily espoused their cause against the papacy. In the contest that followed Pope Lucius II

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

was slain, and Pope Eugenius III had to fly to France and find protection with the all-powerful Abbot of Clairvaux.

### *The Second Crusade*

These clashes were as naught compared with the task which the Pope imposed upon Bernard. News of the fall of Edessa in 1144 had caused consternation in Europe; it meant that the Holy Places were once more in danger. What price the glory of Chartres Cathedral, built that same year, or the success of great monasteries in their zealous reforms, when the Holy City itself was in peril? A crusade must be launched, so Bernard was summoned to rouse Europe. The humble though powerful Cistercian, most eloquent of preachers, was overwhelmed with fear when he received his order from the Holy See. "Brethren," he could say to his fellow monks, "it is good for us to be here, but lo! this evil day calleth us away." To play a leading role in camp and court was indeed high adventure, yet the enactment of such a role seemed all but impossible. At fifty-four, weak from austerities, Bernard seemed only a wraith of a man, but that frail body housed an indomitable spirit. "Do you shrink," he wrote to a timid monk, "do you shrink, delicate soldier, from the roughness and weight of war? Ah, believe me, the enemy's onset and the thick flying arrows and spears will make the shield very light in your grasp, and will render you insensible to the pressure of helmet and breastplate. . . . What cause can you have to be afraid . . . with the holy angels as allies, and as Captain, Christ Himself, Who animates His warriors to the conflict with the words, 'Have confidence, I have overcome the world.' " Such was the spirit that blazed in the heart of Bernard as he went from city to city over France and Germany. "The knights," he declared in trumpet tones, "can safely fight the infidels, for they are fighting for God. They

## *Saint Bernard and the Twelfth Century*

are the ministers of God to inflict His vengeance. For them to give or receive death is not a sin, but a most glorious deed!" No knight certainly proved himself more capable, more energetic, more courageous than this white monk who could denounce or move or inspire as the occasion demanded. On the feast of St. John, 1146, he addressed the German Emperor in the Cathedral of Spire; Conrad, moved to tears, declared that the Lord Himself had spoken.

In 1147 two armies, the Germans under Conrad III and the French under Louis VII, embarked on the great crusade. If the infidels, rampant in Syria, threatened the Holy Sepulchre they would have to be rooted out, and without delay. Eastward then rode faith-incited Knights of the Cross, full of zeal and hope. Ere long they found the journey heart-breaking, all the more difficult because of the treachery of the Greeks and the onslaughts of the Turks.

In Asia Minor the German Emperor suffered the loss of most of his army, the rest joining up with the French force at Nicaea. The attack on Damascus resulted in failure, and their numbers were frightfully reduced. To add to the tragedy, Christian nobles in Syria opposed, instead of helping, their cause; squabbling war lords did not improve the situation even though they ennobled themselves by deeds in the field. And when free scope was given to their petty rivalries, one misfortune followed another. Then discipline disappeared, their plans fell through, and they went astray "where deserts swirled sand, serpents lurked, and the sky was their only tent." The Saracens, seeing the plight of the Christian forces, fought the harder, and presently the glorious adventure became an utter rout. There were many who remained in the East, took root and labored for the Christian cause. The French King, Louis, journeyed on to Antioch, thence to Jerusalem to visit the Holy Places, and after that

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

made his weary way home from a crusade that had proved a dismal failure.

### *Study in Contrasts*

Fancy the feelings of Bernard when he learned of the disasters that had overtaken the armies of the cross. The white monk's fiery eloquence had sent them forth eager for victory, but of all the crusades none had ended more disastrously. On the return of the shadowy, downhearted knights, the spear of scorn, arrows of criticism, were levelled at the great preacher. In one of the darkest hours of his life, a man of less courage would have gone down before such anger and bitter abuse. But not the great Cistercian; he remained battered but unbowed, he even stood up under a worse blow — black treachery and betrayal by Nicholas, the secretary whom he had so trusted. Sick at heart, none the less Bernard could cry out as he had at the death of his brother, Gerard, "My very bowels are torn away; and it is said to me 'Do not feel any pain.' But I do feel pain and this in spite of myself; I have not the insensibility of a stone, nor is my flesh bronze. . . ." As the heavy years unfolded, the picture which you see is that of an old monk in his sixties. Once he had been as much at home in camp with rough soldiers as with Kings in their throne room. No longer, alas, for he was feeble, worn, emaciated, on the brink of eternity, withal the same lovable monk ever so humble, sweet and gracious. And come what might, he still remained the most illustrious man of the day, the single-hearted servant of the Church who had put down heresies, healed schisms, and shaped the century's destiny. In his brief hour this founder of Christian mysticism of the Middle Ages opened one hundred sixty-three monasteries throughout Europe, and shepherded thousands of souls; his ardent personality and exalted ideal-

## *Saint Bernard and the Twelfth Century*

ism had drawn multitudes into the far-famed Cistercian ranks. "How many men of letters, how many orators, how many philosophers," said Ernald of Bonneval, "have deserted the schools of worldly wisdom and entered the school of Christ? Which of the sciences is not represented in that community wherein so many illustrious doctors and men of cultured minds now occupy themselves exclusively with the things of God."

Bernard had scarcely left the earthly scene than another great figure, poles apart from the saint, took the stage. He was Frederick I (the Italians nicknamed him Red Beard — Barbarossa) who at thirty ascended the German throne in the full vigor of early manhood. Small and fair-complexioned but as fiery as his beard, Frederick deemed himself nothing less than the successor of Charlemagne; so, informing Pope Eugene III of his appointment by God (not by man), he proceeded to dominate the whole Empire. In 1154 he crossed the Alps and quelled the Lombards; later he was to smash the power of the Republicans of Rome and cause Arnold of Brescia to be summarily executed. Red Beard, you see, was a battler to the knuckles of his iron fist, and when he put the Lombards in their place he unwittingly did the papacy a service. The new Pope, Adrian IV, an Englishman, handsome, fearless and solidly pious, was not the sort to quail before any ruler. When he learned of Frederick's approach Romewards he advanced to meet the ruler at Sutra; as the Vicar of Christ rode up to the royal tent, the King refused to hold the stirrup for him to dismount. Adrian held out firmly. Either this holding of the stirrup or else no kiss of peace! At last Frederick relented, and was later crowned Emperor but in a tumult that cost the lives of eight hundred Romans. The Pope had his fears, however, knowing Red Beard for a man of fiery aggression and unscrupulous ambition, backed

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

by a united Germany. Nor was trouble long in coming. No sooner had Adrian sanctioned the conquests of William of Sicily than the Emperor took revenge by freezing German incomes and refusing to assist the Holy See. In the bitter controversy that ensued the Pope made a secret treaty with Milan and her allies, while the Emperor turned about and plotted with the Roman Republicans. The Teuton who had blindly laid claim to all the powers of Caesar of old, was saved from excommunication only by the death of Adrian. Then the trouble began afresh when, in a clutch for power, he engineered a papal schism; but Alexander III (1159-1181) succeeded, over the Emperor's hireling, Victor III, and was acknowledged in Sicily, Milan, and all the greater countries of the West, save, of course, Germany. All this time the white monks and Carthusians made it their business to travel over Europe, tell the world of the Emperor's misguided activities, and warn them against the anti-Popes. Though Red Beard came down and wiped out Milan, yet his show of fury availed him little in the eyes of the Church, and his next anti-Pope Paschal proved an equally flat failure.

### *Echoes in England*

The same old issue between temporal and spiritual powers was joined in far-off England. Thomas à Becket, trusted advisor and chancellor of Henry II, had by royal request become the Archbishop of Canterbury. Loyal to the core of his soldier-heart, he served the Church as faithfully as he had served his King, refusing to allow the clergy to be brought under the jurisdiction of the civil courts. All ministers of the Church, the primate insisted, should be tried in church courts according to Canon Law. Again, as in Germany, there were time-serving bishops who took sides with the King, but Becket stoutly refused to budge an inch from his

### *Saint Bernard and the Twelfth Century*

orthodox position. Thus began a quarrel which grew so bitter that Becket, aware of the King's violent passions, had to fly to France. He returned only to find the outlook for peace decidedly grim. "From whom have you the Archbishopric?" Fitz Urse brazenly asked. "The spirituals," Thomas answered, "I have from my God and my lord, the Pope; the temporals and possessions from my lord, the King." That was that — and unmistakably clear. "Do you not then," persisted the royal emissary, "acknowledge that you hold the whole from the King?" "No," was the prelate's bold reply, "we have to render to the King the things which are the King's, and to God the things that are God's." There you have the whole issue in a nutshell, but Becket's brave stand did not at all suit Henry. "Have I no one," he cried, "no one who will relieve me from the insults of this turbulent priest?" Fatal words! They were quickly answered on December 29, 1170, when four knights hastened to Canterbury and broke into the cathedral chapel. "Where is the traitor?" they shouted as they drew their swords. No answer came; but when they cried, "Where is the Archbishop?" Becket replied, "Here I am, an Archbishop, but no traitor!" For a little, ringed by an evil band, he stood them off; and when they tried to drag him out of the cathedral, he stoutly resisted. A sword stroke aimed at his head wounded him, but he bent his head in prayer. Two more strokes and they despatched the martyr near by the steps of his favorite altar.

The brutal murder of Becket in his own cathedral shook England to its very foundations. Nothing so infamous, so sacrilegious had happened since the foul days of the Danes. Not only clerics but laymen openly expressed their indignation; soon the people rose in fury against the King, and the Pope decided on his punishment. Henry, full of torment

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

and terror, protested that he had not ordered the fell deed. He fled to Normandy, perhaps to elude the visit of the delegates from the Pope who had the full story of the slaying from envoys sent by the King. What they said or what they did not say, certain it was that Henry must show repentance for this scandal of Christendom. In two years' time Pope Alexander had canonized Thomas à Becket, martyr for God and the Church. Even the King's oath that he was innocent left England in doubt, while quarrels in the royal family made matters worse. Henry finally decided on a public act of penance, and a scene was enacted not unlike that at Canossa a century earlier. At Southampton, he began the long journey on horse to the tomb of the martyred Thomas à Becket. And when he espied the spires of Christ Church in the distance, he dismounted, put on the garb of a penitent, and went barefoot along the road, insisting that the monks scourge him with reeds. He entered the crowded Cathedral, making his way into the crypt where Becket's tomb had been erected. The Bishop of London meantime addressed the people, trying his best to prove the King's innocence. A little later Henry returned to the crypt, spent the night in prayer, and after attending Mass, took the road to London. After all, he had elected the way of penance, the only road to peace.

### *Third Crusade*

Hard upon the repentance of Henry of England, the bellicose German Emperor, was given time for pause. Hungry for domination, he had marched down to Italy in 1174 to break the power of the Lombards but he received a severe setback in the battle of Legnano. By degrees, it would seem, Frederick was also learning the lesson, that he "who bites the Pope dies of it." At Venice, the war-weary and

## *Saint Bernard and the Twelfth Century*

battle-scarred schemer fell at Alexander's feet only to be raised up and receive the kiss of peace. A lull followed during which Frederick's power suddenly rose to its zenith; but before he could wield it as was his wont, dire news broke in the West. Jerusalem had fallen into the hands of Saladin; the True Cross as well as the Holy Places were said to be in infidel hands! It was a sad story indeed, from beginning to end. Saladin, the wily Moslem, had tempted the Crusaders into a trap on the heights of Hattin in Galilee. On a murky July night in 1187 they had to go without water; the next day their courage was scorched as they choked in their hot armor, blinded by the scrub-fire started by the enemy. And though they fought like tigers against sun, fire and sword, the infidel troops swiftly rode them down, inflicting utter defeat. No sooner had Europe recovered from the first shock than it rose up in arms. All dynastic quarrels were buried for the time being, as eagerly and hopefully they joined forces to recover the Holy Land. Frederick gathered a great army, as did the English King, Richard I, and Philip of France. They moved, unfortunately, as separate divisions, and at different times. The Germans marched overland by way of Constantinople; the French King sailed from Genoa; the English King from Marseilles.

Alas for Barbarossa and his magnificent army. The doughty leader, now almost seventy, was drowned while attempting to swim the river Salef in Cilicia. His Teuton knights, betrayed by the Greeks, met disaster at the hands of the Arabs; many straggled back to the homeland, many more were slain, or sold into slavery. Had Frederick lived to reach Palestine the story of the Third Crusade might indeed have been far different. For his was beyond doubt a hard fighting army, with able leadership and battle-experienced soldiers. In the meantime the French and English

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

forces dilly-dallied on their way and when they finally reached the Holy Land, old-time rivalries were renewed. There can be no doubt but that the personal antagonism of these self-centered Kings did enormous damage to the Christian cause. They did not co-operate, even after the capture of Acre; there was delay, suspicion, division, all of which boded no good. The infidel leader, aware of all this, bided his time on the Central Range, not daring to march on Jerusalem until the Jordan Valley, the Maritime Plain and Askalon had fallen into his hands. He knew very well that Judea, throughout history, had been a tough nut for any foe to crack. Inevitably the fate of Palestine was settled when Saladin conquered the rest of the land and marched in from Hebron, Askalon and the north to take over the Holy City. The only real result of the Third Crusade was the capture of Cyprus by Richard and of Acre by the combined armies. For the rest, it was a tragic failure, despite the bravery of Richard, who fought like a lion, and slew Saracens right and left. It was clear that the spirit of the early Crusaders had long since died out. Zeal and united action were things of the past; little of the old fighting faith persisted.

### *War Not Peace*

As with the Third Crusade in the East, so with the stay-at-home Christians in the West. The closing decades of the twelfth century witnessed age-old rivalry, unrest and violence all over Europe. Error and doubt beset the minds of men, and fanatics stirred religious revolt: the papacy had lost temporal power, even its spiritual power was at very low ebb. Frederick Barbarossa's son, the twenty-four-year-old Henry VI, proved himself as puny and mean as he was daring. His covetous eyes were upon the Kingdom of Sicily, a rich prize indeed. Had he not married Constance, daughter of

## *Saint Bernard and the Twelfth Century*

Roger, King of Sicily, and did not the whole southern peninsula belong to him? In his own Germany, however, he soon ran afoul of a powerful vassal, Henry the Lion, who attempted to regain his duchy, and not until 1190 could they come to terms. Henry, a chip of the old red block, was as cruel and ambitious as his father, Barbarossa, and equally resourceful. Let the Pope cool his heels at the Rock of Peter for all he cared; an Emperor's right was to be master of the world — east, west, even the Holy Land. None the less he had to win papal approval, so he made south for Italy to secure the imperial crown at Rome from the hands of the ninety-year old Pope Celestine III. He aimed to conquer Naples but when he attempted to subdue the city, the fiery patriots put up a stout defense and his army was well-nigh wiped out by the plague. Then he retreated northward, leaving his wife a hostage in the hands of Tancred, an illegitimate descendant of the Norman Kings.

The rest of Henry's dealings with iron fortune were marked with bloodshed and ultimate defeat. It was the age-old story of lust of power gone berserk in an attempt to rule the world. No sooner had the Emperor returned to Germany than he ran into the Guelph insurrection, engineered by Henry the Lion. At this critical moment he was able to subdue the insurgents only because Richard was still in captivity. The English King, an ally of Henry the Lion and Tancred, had been captured by the Duke of Austria and handed over to the Emperor in 1193. This act was nothing if not a wanton outrage, since a crusader was under the protection of the Church. Even so, the German, ever a law unto himself, succeeded in his trick which was besides a grave moral offense. Nor did Richard secure his freedom until he had recognized Henry's claims, paid the heavy ransom, and declared England an imperial fief. Old Lion-

*Church History in the Light of the Saints*

heart died two years later, in 1195, leaving the Emperor free to muster a great army with his ransom money, and return to the conquest of the whole south. This time, however, he would have to deal, not with a feeble old Pope, like Celestine III, but with the clever, vigorous Innocent III (1198-1216), the right man to check his moves and uncover imperial trickery. His plan was snagged when the Pope objected to the Emperor's taking over Sicily, of which he was not only spiritual head but temporal suzerain. And just at the hour when the would-be lord of the world was about to wreak vengeance with fire and sword, as he had done with all who dared thwart the royal will, death decided the issue. At Messina in August of 1197, he succumbed to the throes of fever, and that same year Innocent followed him to the grave. Then the turn came. With Henry's going, the kingdom of Sicily fell from German hands, while the Patrimony of St. Peter was no longer boxed up between imperial arms. Indeed, not only Italy but all Europe must have breathed a sigh of relief, after having groaned so long under such tyranny.

# Saint Thomas of Aquino

EUROPE'S GREATEST THINKER

# SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS AND THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

<i>Emperors</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
OTTO IV, 1208-1212 FREDERICK II, 1212-1250	Innocent rules Church with firm hand	1200 INNOCENT III,
	Mongols threaten Europe	1202 1198-1216
	Fourth Crusade	1202
	Latins seize Constantinople	1204
	Dominic founds Convent of Prouille	1206
	Crusade against the Albigenses	1208
	Francis of Assisi goes forth preaching	1209
	Children's Crusade	1212
	Birth of Louis IX, King of France	1215
	Fourth Council of Lateran	1215
	Dominicans spread over Europe	1216
	Pope Honorius III crowns Frederick Emperor	1220
	University of Naples established	1224
	Establishment of the Inquisition	1225
	Frederick excommunicated by Gregory IX	1227
	Birth of Thomas Aquinas	1227
	Fifth Crusade	1228
	Death of Anthony of Padua	1231
	Aquinas at Monte Cassino	1232
	Birth of Raymond Lull	1236
	Kingdom of Granada founded	1238
	Mongol Invasion	1240
	Aquinas at University of Naples	1240
CONRAD IV, 1250	Aquinas joins Dominicans at Naples	1243
	Aquinas imprisoned, then goes to Cologne	1244
	Aquinas in Paris with Albert the Great	1245
	Sixth Crusade under St. Louis	1248
	Aquinas lectures in Cologne	1248
	Death of Frederick at Fiorento	1250
	Birth of St. Gertrude the Great	1256
	Aquinas Regent of University of Paris	1257
	Manfred crowns himself King of Sicily	1258
	Fall of Latin Empire in the East	1261
	Aquinas in England	1263
	Institution of Feast of Corpus Christi	1264
	Birth of Dante	1265
	Birth of John Duns Scotus	1265
	Seventh and Last Crusade under St. Louis	1270
RUDOLPH I, 1273	Council of Lyons	1274
	Aquinas dies in a Cistercian monastery	1274
	Death of St. Bonaventure	1274
ADOLPH OF NASSAU, 1292		
ALBERT I, of Hapsburg, 1298		

## SAINT THOMAS OF AQUINO AND THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

### *The Great Hundred Years*

What an amazing century! The greatest of them all, perhaps, because it was an Age of Faith and of humanity's highest achievement. No hundred pages of history can equal its record of immortal names, epochal doings, great systems of thought. Think of a century which could produce a king like St. Louis, the philosopher St. Thomas, the poet Dante, the mystic St. Gertrude, the scientist Roger Bacon, the reformer St. Francis. Never was the wealth of genius so abundant; "good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, running over" into the lap of time. Many great universities of Europe were founded in this century, educators and schoolmen adding new subjects to their fields. The multiplication of schools brought an advance of learning, power came with knowledge, men everywhere were having new thoughts. As contact was made with Grecian and Arabic civilization science made greater strides, and art actually reached perfection in the work of wood-carving and glass-painting. The Gothic cathedral displayed "the greatest synthesis of beauty made operative through art, that man has ever achieved." Even more striking was the progress of human liberty, seen in the rise of guilds, confraternities, free cities. With the emancipation of peasants, feudalism began to break up, and the way was paved for economic and industrial development. When there was no such thing as systematic bookkeeping, public budget, or the like, in any secular state, the papacy developed a thorough method of finance and control of exchange. It looked, in fine, as if the

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

Christian Commonwealth had come at last, with several states its parts, and the Roman Curia a tribunal of last resort. Indeed, "for the first time in the European scene we behold not merely man but humanity."

With these facts in mind, let us also view the black spots on those hundred pages. Europe was not a Utopia in any sense of the word. There were conflicts, wars, and bitter attacks on the old order. Bold resistance was raised against the Holy See: more than one Emperor fought the Pope, imprisoned bishops, attacked the Eternal City. The Mongols overran Europe's eastern boundary; in the west the Moslem ruled lower Spain, and even fraternized with the faithful in many parts of the south. Jews were despised, hated, very often persecuted throughout the Empire: and just as the twelfth century witnessed the "Brethren of the Sword" coercing the poor pagan Livonians, so now the German knights ruthlessly subjugated the stubborn Prussians. Latin Christians, behaving no better than pirates, seized Constantinople, and left the broken Greek Empire at the mercy of the Turk, deadliest foe of the Church and of civilization. On all sides dangerous and undisciplined fanatics, like the Waldenese and the Humiliati, disrupted the peace. The Albigenses, vilest of all sects, held hideous doctrines about the family, decried life and encouraged suicide. Once the public wrath was aroused, mobs quickly formed, and massacres followed, fanatical leaders being burned at the stake for threatening the State. One sees then that the century presents a veritable paradox, not one age but two. "We look into the moods of some men, and it might be the Stone Age; we look into the minds of other men, and they might be living in the Golden Age." As an example of the latter take St. Francis and St. Dominic who brought such heavenly wisdom, dynamic truth, and intellectual power into the

## *Saint Thomas of Aquino and the Thirteenth Century*

world. Their spiritual sons, more than any others, daily labored to renew the face of Europe. One of these was the Dominican, St. Thomas of Aquino, "the greatest mind that European blood gave to the world." Anyone who follows his career can glimpse an astounding spectacle in the human activity and aspiration of the thirteenth century.

### *A Genius at School*

Thomas, a seventh son, was born in 1227 in a castle near Naples that bore the name of The Dry Rock. His father, Landulf of the house of Sammacoli, was Count of Aquino, his mother, Countess of Teano, sprang from the old Norman dukes of south Italy. They were proud folk of noble lineage, yet nowise innocent of outrageous doings, living as they did in an age of disorder and violence. Their kinsman, the iron-fisted Emperor Frederick II, determined to dominate Europe, but the babe-in-arms at Aquino was destined to rule it intellectually and spiritually. At this time the Turks menaced the west, and it was Frederick's sworn duty to go out and halt them in their tracks. Self-willed, however, he took his time about it, though later, after he had been excommunicated, he went on the Sixth Crusade. Of this mettlesome cousin, Thomas must have heard many things in his boyhood; as indeed of his other relatives, the Emperors Frederick I and Henry II, and the Kings of Aragon, Castile and France. But far more thrilling were the tales of the Children's Crusade. Mere boys, French and German, had armed themselves and set out all by themselves to fight the Turks. They marched down to sea-ports — Marseilles and Naples — to embark for the Holy Land, thousands of them afire with a mighty crusading spirit. Alas, they never reached their goal, nor did they ever return; many perished on the way and the rest were captured by the infidels who sold them in

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the slave markets of the East. A score of years after that tragedy Thomas was in the cloister school of Monte Cassino. He was only five, yet even then the Benedictine instructors discerned in him not only great genius but a sweet nature and a heart full of love and devotion. Thomas took delight in probing deep things rather than in games and pastimes. "What is God?" he constantly asked. "What is God? What is God?" And when the faculty discussed this singular pupil, so alert in class, so keen of thought, so pure in word as in deed, they let him take the habit of an Oblate, sending him to Naples in 1236 to continue his studies.

The University of Naples, established twelve years earlier, welcomed the young Oblate from Monte Cassino. He followed the course of the Liberal Arts: the Trivium (grammar, logic, rhetoric) and the Quadrivium (music, mathematics, geometry, astronomy) under very able teachers. Not an easy course, you will admit, for a grown-up, let alone for the lad just entering his teens. Soon he excelled even so famous a teacher as Martini, the grammarian, and they put him under the tutelage of Peter of Ireland, an authority on logic and the natural sciences. The brilliant Thomas, deep student as he was at this time, hearing the divine call, had his heart set upon becoming a religious. On the streets of Naples he had come across the Begging Friars of St. Dominic; they were, to his mind, the real crusaders, soldiers of Jesus Christ, who practiced poverty, instructed the poor and the ignorant, waged war against the evils of their day, especially luxury and the indolence of the clergy. One of their number, the celebrated preacher, John of St. Julian, attracted the university student; they became fast friends, and one day after a visit Thomas returned to the university fully determined to join the Dominicans. The news flew over the campus, spread through Naples, finally reached the castle of

## *Saint Thomas of Aquino and the Thirteenth Century*

Aquino. Such an idea! The son of Landulf a mere friar when he could have been made Abbot of Monte Cassino. Then the trouble started in earnest. Down came the Countess, posthaste, to put an end to all this Begging Friar nonsense. Only she did not — the strong-minded lady found her son hard as iron in his resolve to become a friar! From then on the Aquino family made it so hot for Thomas that he had to say "vale" to the university and make tracks for Rome. In 1243 he took the Dominican habit, despite maternal protests and it was decided to send him to Paris where he would be quite removed from family interference. The Countess, however, resourceful Norman lady that she was, refused to accept defeat and made plans to stop what she regarded as suicidal foolery. One day when a group of young Dominican novices *in camarata* made their way along the streets of Rome, they were violently set upon by iron-jointed soldiers. The assailants, none other than Thomas's brothers, attacking like wildcats, seized and kidnapped the young friar under the eyes of his companions. Their act was, of course, typical of a day when civilians as well as soldiers were wont to employ any means at hand, fair or foul, to gain their end.

### *Virtue Under Siege*

Thomas found himself a prisoner in the fortress of San Giovanni. At once the Aquino family started in to break down the spirit of the young noble. The count and countess argued and argued with their stubborn son; his sisters used all the wiles at their disposal. No use. Not on their terms would Thomas make peace; in the show-down even his brothers saw that the novice could be as tough in spirit and endurance as themselves. Yes, he was decided, absolutely decided, and they were just losing valuable time. Irate,

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

they resorted to the brutish realism of the times, doing a most dastardly thing. A courtesan was hustled into the tower to ensnare the imprisoned but indomitable friar. As the evil enchantress entered the cold room, a fire, not lust, but holy indignation, surged and ran through his veins! No woman, good or bad could rule that pure heart which belonged to God and His cause. Quick as a flash, Thomas snatched a brand from the fireplace and drove the temptress, as he would a viper, from the place. After that he fell on his knees, begging God to grant him purity of mind and body all his life long. Worn out from long praying on the icy stones, he soon fell into a deep slumber. Lo! two angels appeared in a vision to assure him that his prayer had been heard in Heaven and answered; they girded him about with the white girdle of chastity; and from that day forward the Dominican never experienced any temptation against the angelic virtue.

It began to look as if Thomas had not a chance in the world to regain his liberty. Month followed month, still no hope, not even the dimmest. None the less he clung, loyally though grimly, to his cause, having fighting Norman blood, which along with the grace of God stood him in good stead. Still life must have been monotonous, disappointing, at times positively difficult. A ray of light came the day his sister, moved with pity, provided him with books—the Holy Scriptures, Aristotle's "*Metaphysics*," and the "*Sentences*" of Peter Lombard. And hope was born when the friars managed to worm their way into San Giovanni under cover of darkness and provide him with a new habit, which filled his mixed cup of joy and suffering to the brim. He appeared content to stay there forever, if God so willed: for "in God's will was his peace." Heroically he stuck it out for two long years, during which the days were spent in prayer and study.

### *Saint Thomas of Aquino and the Thirteenth Century*

Had he been at the university or in the schools of Rome, Thomas could not have made greater spiritual or intellectual progress. In the meantime through the efforts of his friends, both Pope and Emperor were approached on behalf of the silent prisoner. Delay followed delay until at length a few courageous friars took the matter into their own hands. They stole past the gate one dark night, made for the tower room and lowered Thomas down the prison walls in a basket, just as St. Paul was liberated when he was imprisoned in Damascus. Much ado was made over this daring rescue especially by the keepers of the fortress and the Aquino family. But after his superiors had seen to it that Thomas had an interview with Pope Innocent IV, who carefully examined him, the whole matter was hushed. The Holy Father gave Thomas his blessing, and strictly forbade any further interference with the fearless Dominican.

### *Crisis in the Church*

This Pope, Innocent IV, was not a man to be trifled with, even in an age of rebels and haters of the Holy See. A Genoese nobleman, his dealings with the Emperor proved friendly enough at first, though he did not trust the royal schemer. Each needed the other's help more than ever, what with Ghengis Khan leading his Mongol hordes into Europe and anarchy threatening the existence of both Empire and Church. Yet Pope and Emperor failed, as in past centuries, to come to terms; indeed, Innocent was Frederick's most persistent adversary. Slyly the German began to mass his armies about Rome, but the Pope, disguised as a knight, made his way to Genoa, thence to France. The Council of Lyons condemned the Emperor as unfit to rule, and straightway deposed him. This precipitated a bitter conflict, with inter-city strife, angry revolt, and the attempted assassi-

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

nation of Frederick. Even more menacing to the peace of Europe was the rapid rise of blind reformers and soul-shriveled fanatics. Led by Peter Waldo, the "poor men of Lyons" decried widespread clerical abuses, while the Cathari displayed a fiery zeal for purity of life. But the most deadly of all these sects were the Albigenses who held to the vilest errors. Far-sighted men stood aghast at the doings and doctrines of these vicious plotters who, it was clear to Thomas, imperilled all Christendom. There is a story of the great sage at the court of St. Louis where the momentous evil was being discussed. He sat at the royal table, absorbed in thought over the impending threat, catching only snatches of the important conference. Suddenly the King and his councillors received a jolt. The blackfriar, waking from deep thought, brought his huge fist down on the table with a smashing blow — "And that," he cried, "will settle the Manichees!" The wonder is that the courtiers did not then and there dispose of the disturber. Indeed, they were about to seize the big Italian for what they regarded as an outrageous breach of court etiquette when the King quietly deterred them. Much to the surprise of all, Louis ordered his secretaries to take note of what Thomas had to say, and put down his arguments carefully on paper, for they must have been very good ones to bring about such a shock.

The powerful Dominican thinker had every reason to be excited over the old Manichee peril, in the person of its murderous minions the Albigenses. This sect took its name from Albi, a town in south France where the fanatics used to gather for their unspeakable rites. Very soon they spread all over Languedoc poisoning the countryside with their wicked tenets. After Dominic (1190-1221) had tried in vain to stem the evil tide, the great Spaniard formed a community to serve the poor and preach against the heretic, and

## *Saint Thomas of Aquino and the Thirteenth Century*

Pope Innocent III gladly countenanced his plan. Yet the Albigenses grew like noxious weeds until something had to be done; unless this puritan anarchy was suppressed, Europe would soon be close to the brink of chaos. The papal legate, Peter of Castelnau, who attempted to control the vile rebels was murdered in cold blood. Then the Pope launched a crusade against them, naming Arnold, Abbot of Cîteaux and Simon de Montfort to lead the attack. Brutal methods were employed as they battered their way into heathen strongholds and so bloody was the resistance that the crusaders saw red and slew right and left. It was war to the hilt, a war that grew beyond the control of the Pope when the crusaders savagely determined to avenge the injuries done the Church and society. In a short time inquisitorial powers were brought into play, the First Lateran Council (1215) bidding the bishops ferret out heresy and punish the offenders. In 1232 the control of the Inquisition was entrusted to the Dominicans, and in 1252 Pope Innocent III, looking ahead with a shrewd eye, sanctioned the most severe means of putting down the murderous Albigenses.

### *In the Schools of Paris*

By mid-century Thomas's name and fame were known throughout Europe. Earlier he had been taken to Cologne to continue his studies under the ablest of German schoolmen, Albert the Great. This Dominican, regarded the greatest teacher in the university, glimpsed the genius of the heavy-built seventeen-year old who actually shrank from applause. Not so Thomas's classmates, they regarded the humble friar as somewhat stupid and nicknamed him "The Dumb Ox." One morning in the lecture-room Albert gave them something to think over: "You call him a dumb ox," he shot out, "I tell you the Dumb Ox will bellow so loud that

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

his bellowing will fill the world." Few things in university life were finer than the comradeship of these two scholars, resting on the basis of complete understanding and mutual affection. In 1245 the famous teacher and his favorite pupil might be seen wending their way to Paris; Albert to receive the doctorate and continue his lectures there, Thomas to pursue his studies in philosophy and theology. They tramped all the way and slept in friendly monasteries until they reached their destination. The city of the great St. Louis must have opened Thomas's eyes, for it was "a thing white like lilies and splendid as the oriflamme." Its university counted no less than thirty thousand students, youth from France, Normandy, Picardy, England and Germany. Paris took the Italian friar's breath away, no doubt, yet it failed to win a heart set on the City of God rather than any passing pageant: "I would rather have that Chrysostom manuscript I can't get hold of," was his comment. One can be sure that Thomas never lost his head or his heart amid the fuss and riot of the great city. For fuss and riot there was aplenty with the streets and by-ways crowded with noisy, hilarious youth exposed to an education. On every side one could hear chit-chat, argument, mimicry, contentions. Many a fight was staged in the city streets when a French crowd tried to jibe at the German students or swaggering Picardese ran afoul of the English. Smash! crack! and the battle was on, giving the police their hands full to quell the student riots.

But that was not the sort of thing for which Thomas had come to Paris. The quiet steady blackfriar stuck to his scholastic work month after month. New schools of law, medicine, philosophy and theology might spring up about him, yet the one school he preferred was the chapel. Open a chink in the chapel door and you could glimpse him at prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Or peer into his cell

## *Saint Thomas of Aquino and the Thirteenth Century*

and you could see him pondering his favorite text, the Book of the Crucifix. He began his studies with prayer; when faced with knotty problems he was wont to fall on his knees, begging God for light. In the lecture-hall fellow students marvelled as much at his humility as at his unquestioned brilliance in argumentation. "A startling new student!" they were quite agreed, "an amazing personality!" This big Dominican could joke, too, often about his bulk, and he believed that pranks had a place in life. They knew nothing of his sanctity, which he always kept secret, but they did sense that he was an intellectual aristocrat. He would argue, yet no one ever heard him sneer or resort to a quarrel; and he had a way of explaining an idea or unfolding a truth which often left them dumbfounded. More impressive still, when he set out to nail a lie or expose a fallacy, they could only think of a well-bred hound steadily pursuing the quarry through every twist and turn until he had it caught dead in its own dark lair. The popular compendium of that day was "*The Four Books of Sentences by Peter Lombard.*" Not only did Thomas prove himself a past master in clarifying this great work; he also had the Bible and the Fathers of the Church at his mental finger-ends. Naturally enough, after two years' residence in Paris, his superiors recalled the young Master of Theology to Cologne there to take up his work in a teaching capacity.

### *The Great Teacher*

Back in the University of Cologne the Dumb Ox began to low, but with such repressed power that his lectures presently drew thousands of students. The ancient city, founded on an old Roman military camp, could count many great teachers from Germany and Italy, besides claiming as its own Albert the Great. None the less the faculty soon recog-

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

nized the fact that the remarkably big-statured twenty-year-old excelled them all. Big he was in every way, physically, mentally, morally: and deep also, with the depth of genius. The work of the young Master was to explain the "Sentences," those points of philosophy and theology which he had long since mastered in the tower of San Giovanni. He lectured with quiet force, radiating firmness, and always inspiring the crowd that sat at his feet. His brilliant talent, enhanced by a sweet disposition, won the confidence of the shyest and the interest of the boldest. You may be sure they flung out all sorts of questions: how about this new claim of science; what did angels do; how could this be right, that wrong. And in the after-class quizzes so dear to eager pupils, many marvelled at the humility, the simplicity of his answers. For example, asked "whether the names of all the blessed were written on a scroll to be seen in heaven," he replied, "So far as I can see, this is not the case; but there is no harm in saying so." Interested profoundly in the souls of his pupils Thomas had small patience with pomp or circumstance or the trappings of nobility. He did, however, have one insatiable ambition; that was to serve his fellowmen and frequently he was seen to give help to beggars on the streets. In the monastery, when not at his cell or in chapel, he would walk furiously fast round the cloister, that great brain engaged in combat with deep problems. The philosopher Plato, he knew almost by heart, having seen the influence of the Great Greek in the books of the New Testament and the Fathers. But Aristotle he had to learn through corrupt Arab and Greek texts and it was one of his highest achievements to separate the gold of truth from the dross of error which encrusted it.

Before long the humble genius was called upon by Naples, Bologna, Paris, Oxford and other universities. Paris in

## *Saint Thomas of Aquino and the Thirteenth Century*

particular, wanted him, nay demanded him as a lecturer. So, after four years at Cologne, his superiors sent him once more to the greatest of the universities. He found the city much the same except that the neighborly feeling of earlier days had disappeared; crowds jostled one another, the lecture-rooms were overcrowded, the old-time feuds between gown and town grew daily worse. Thomas presently found himself in a bad situation that prevented his securing the doctorate. It came about in this way; the students in the university had a brawl with the city police, during which heads were cracked and bitter feelings engendered. Instead of letting the matter die out, the university authorities decided to close the schools until the civil authorities should agree to settle the dispute equably. It was an old-time "strike," and the blackfriars became the black sheep because they stood aloof from the combatants. The secular doctors refused to grant a degree to the Order men and Thomas found himself left out in the cold. Think of it, the greatest mind of that day denied a miserable sheepskin because of a petty quarrel. The Pope and the King stepped in, however, and ordered the Regent of the University to grant the degrees; even at that, it took eleven papal briefs to bring the stubborn authorities to a sense of duty. Then two men, the greatest of their century, Thomas, the blackfriar, and Bonaventure, the grayfriar, stepped up on the dais, and received their doctorates.

### *Growth in Grace and Truth*

These years proved the richest seed-time for the harvest of Truth, the world would reap when the Summa was finally completed. All this time the greatest mind in Europe was in demand everywhere. Paris claimed him for her very own. Popes sought to have him near at hand. The Do-

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

minican authorities, of course, wanted him in their own schools. From 1252 to 1260 Thomas was professor at Paris, and in 1261 Pope Urban summoned him to live in the papal court. After directing the Dominican school at Rome, then the school at Viterba (1265-1267), he was recalled to the University of Paris where he spent two years. But it was in Bologna, whither he was ordered in 1271, that the *Summa* saw the light of day. Now all who ran could see in black and white the zeal of a great saint to make known the law of God and the teaching of the Church. Nothing like this epochal work had ever appeared in Europe; it filled ten volumes and revealed a lucidity of mind, a power of argument in array, a clear vision of thought, the very heart and soul of a matchless scholar. It left such an impression on the learned world that men hailed Thomas as the "Angelic Doctor," and the universities as usual kept up their battle to secure the author as a teacher. And all this time Thomas lived as quietly and humbly as ever, except when his friar-brethren dragged him away from his cell for a breath of fresh air in the garden; or when a lay-brother ignorant of the "Who's Who" of that day, gave him a bag to carry to market, an obedience which Thomas accepted with undisturbed good humor. His habit was always the poorest, and it is said that he wrote the epoch-making "*Contra Gentiles*" on the back of old letters and scraps of paper.

High above his mental greatness was the superb spirituality, the holiness of this scholar who was such a bone of contention among the learned. The tradition goes that one day Thomas laid upon the altar a new work and a Voice from the crucifix said, "Well hast thou written concerning Me, Thomas. What shall I give thee as a reward?" And Thomas replied, "Naught but Thyself, O Lord." The pattern of Christ was ever before his eyes and the profundity of his devotion was

### *Saint Thomas of Aquino and the Thirteenth Century*

poured forth to Christ crucified, and to the Blessed Eucharist of which mystery he wrote so illuminatingly. In this he found a kindred soul, Bonaventure the Franciscan, whom he first met at the university where they contracted one of the most beautiful friendships ever recorded. They were in the habit of visiting each other to discuss the leading problems of the day; once in conversation with Bonaventure, the Dominican was so edified by the Franciscan mystic's depth of insight that he humbly requested to be shown the books from which he had drawn such varied learning. The humble friar, pointing to the crucifix, exclaimed, "It is from this well-spring of light and love that I have drawn whatever is to be found in my lectures or writings." Did Thomas tell him at the time that he too considered the Book of the Cross the greatest volume in the whole world. One wonders. And on another occasion when the holy rivals were commissioned by Pope Urban IV to compose a suitable Office and Mass for the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Franciscan paid a visit to his Dominican friend. Thomas happened to be at work on the Office, and scraps of unfinished manuscript littered the table. In the course of their talk Bonaventure picked up a sheet and read the Antiphon written for the Magnificat:

O exceedingly holy Supper of the Lord,  
Wherein we do feed on Christ,  
do show His death till He come,  
do get grace abundantly to our souls,  
and do take pledge of the glory  
which shall hereafter be revealed to us.  
ALLELUIA!

Overcome by the depth and sweetness of the lines, Bonaventure on his return from the call cast his own manuscript

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

into the fire, for he was convinced of the incomparable worth of his dear friend's composition.

### *For Better For Worse*

The thirteenth century is notable for the vivid contrasts it presents in every province of life. Amid the tumult of war no one would dare enter a church where peace reigned. On the one hand, there was flagrant wickedness, on the other, amazing sanctity. Men, armed in mail, moved in company with the monks whose vows forbade the use of force. A highway might be infested with robbers yet any pilgrim could pass by unharmed. Great cathedrals reared themselves in all their glory — amid the hovels of miserable peasants. But no contrast could be more striking than the temper and inner spirit of rulers, as different from one another as day and night. Take, for instance, Louis IX, King of France, and Frederick II, the Emperor. Among Thomas's friends and admirers was St. Louis, the royal flower of his age. This holy King had little in common with the other rulers of the thirteenth century; nothing at all of the character of the friar's cousin, the Emperor. Born in 1236 he was only eleven when proclaimed King of France which he ruled well under the guardianship of Blanche his saintly and energetic mother. A friend of the clergy, especially the mendicant orders, he endowed many foundations, besides building the Royal Chapel which contained the relics of the True Cross. When Innocent IV summoned the Kings to go forth and deliver the Holy Land from the infidel, Louis alone paid heed to the papal command. With a pilgrim army, almost all of them French soldiers, he embarked on the Sixth Crusade, the plan being to conquer Palestine by way of Egypt. In 1249 Louis was in possession of Damietta, but alas the very next year his men were surrounded and taken

### *Saint Thomas of Aquino and the Thirteenth Century*

prisoners. A great ransom had to be paid before they were set free; part of the army returned home, but the King chose to stay in Palestine for three years. The sole result of his presence there was to hold the Saracens in check and rob them of the fruits of their victory. It was King Louis who invited Thomas to lecture at the University of Paris, wanting to see him in a place of leadership. The years, significantly enough, when Thomas taught in Paris were the very years of St. Louis' greatest temporal glory; both friar and King were directing spirits, each in his own sphere, Thomas caring for mind, heart and soul, Louis governing a kingdom, a task in which he was greatly assisted by the prayers and counsels of the humble friar.

Emperor Frederick II (1215-1250) was almost the exact opposite of St. Louis. Shrewd, tricky, he laid his world-plans carefully, then carried them out ruthlessly. For church authority he had scant regard. "My friendship with a cardinal is possible," he boasted, "with a Pope, never." He assured Pope Honorius III that Sicily would remain a papal fief, pledged his good will towards the Church, but adroitly laid claim to the kingship of Italy in order to hold Rome between the jaws of the German pincers. An earlier Pope, the able Innocent III, had no fear of him, but Honorius III was irked by his delays in marching on crusade. The much more forceful Gregory IX exercised his awful power by excommunicating the malingering Emperor though Frederick did finally go forth, and clinched a smart bargain with the Sultan by which Bethlehem and Nazareth became accessible to Christian pilgrims. Little wonder that people called this incredible man *Stupor Mundi*. If by that is meant a doer of very strange and terrible things, a super-plotter whose conduct shocked the conscience of Europe, the title was truly apt. He tried to get an octopus-like grip on all the nations;

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

he stood cheek by jowl with the Mohammedans, including their harems in his entourage. His sensuality was only equalled by the cruelty he displayed in the torture of women and children. A poet and pantheist philosopher, a sworn freethinker and master of many languages, this astounding Emperor never ceased battling with the Church. He shamelessly schemed to acquire Sicily, body and soul, with the result that he found himself thwarted alike by prince and prelate. He quarrelled with his son Henry over imperial policies, provoked him to revolt, then captured the royal rebel who died in 1242, very likely a suicide. No sooner was his son Conrad safely on the German throne than Frederick, still untaught, came south to start fresh trouble in Italy. In the papal-imperial war that followed he captured and imprisoned several Cardinals who were on their way to attend a council called by Pope Gregory IX in Rome. The College of Cardinals retaliated by electing Innocent IV, who stuck bravely by the policies of his predecessor, and started forces against the oft-convicted perjurer which eventually cost the Hohenstaufens the German throne. The last state of the man who thought he was the Roman Empire proved worse than the first. One calamity followed another in quick succession. His royal physician tried to poison him; his trusted chancellor proved corrupt and committed suicide; the illegitimate Enzo, his son, was made a prisoner; his vassals in Sicily found their titles contested by counter vassals. By this time his wings had been quite clipped; he was less powerful, and consequently less effective. War-weary, yet still on the march, in 1250 he fell victim to dysentery. As he lay ill until death at Ferentino he begged to be reconciled to the Church; the Archbishop of Palermo heard his confession and granted absolution, but the Pope refused to

## *Saint Thomas of Aquino and the Thirteenth Century*

promise that Conrad, his son, should succeed to the imperial throne.

### *The Fruitful Years*

Thomas outlived his imperial cousin nearly a quarter-century. These years, despite political and papal turmoil, proved the most fruitful perhaps in the annals of history. Never had Europe experienced such a change of mind and heart. The guilds bestowed help on the needy, raised the dignity of labor, even as the schoolmen asserted the right of owning property and condemned avarice as a greater sin than prodigality. The great mendicant orders were at work relieving social misery, practicing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, incessantly preaching the duty of neighbor-love. And though they kept their Latin, the sign of unity and the bond with Rome, they always spoke the language understood by the people in Italy, Spain, Provence, France, Germany, Poland, England. It was amazing how noblemen and high-born ladies, struck by their example, practiced self-denial, poured their wealth into institutions for the sick, the orphans, the have-nots. "All men," wrote Clement IV, "have the same origin; they live under the same sky. The immense difference between the Creator and the creature effaces the slight distinction between the King and the serf. . . . The distinction of birth is only an accident, a human institution. . . . God distributes the gifts of the spirit without regard to the division of classes. In His eyes there are neither nobles nor villains." As the flame of the human spirit was refired, the torch of learning spread the light through the darkness of paganism and heresy. The universities, splendidly staffed, thrived mightily — Paris, Cologne, Oxford, Naples, Padua, Bologna, Freiburg, Ratisbon, Strass-

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

burg. Dante was only a youth at school but very soon he would forge a language far richer and more beautiful than Europe had ever known, and in his immortal "*Divine Comedy*" Thomas and Bonaventure were destined to be placed in one of the highest spheres of Paradiso. "The Seraphic Doctor," as Bonaventure was called, became the leading exponent of the Augustinian tradition, while Thomas held with his old teacher Albert for Aristotelian doctrine.

The Master of the Schools was only thirty when they made him Regent of the University of Paris. He continued to teach and write — nor would he lay down his pen till three months before his death. As the years sped by men marvelled at all the big friar achieved for God and his fellowmen in his own order, in the religious world, in higher schools of learning, even in the political world. But greater than any visible achievement was the glory of his mind, the superb spirituality of the man. Asked one day what was the greatest actual grace he had ever received, the answer was, "I think that of having understood whatever I have read." And later he confessed, "So great are the things revealed to me, that all I have hitherto taught and written seem nothing." This, mind you, from the man who made Aristotle a champion of Catholic philosophy; who reconciled faith and reason, developed a new theory of knowledge, and rebuilt the whole structure of ethics. The vast program he accomplished fills the mind with wonder. His great brain housed a huge library, and it was said he could resolve any doubt proposed to him. No wonder the universities clamored for the presence of such a scholar and pestered the Dominican chapters year after year for the loan of his genius. Naturally, the Pope and his Order held first claim to his wisdom and valuable counsels. In 1263 Pope Urban IV sent him to England; and he sat at the General Council held at Holburn. And in

### *Saint Thomas of Aquino and the Thirteenth Century*

1272, at the request of Charles King of Sicily, he was assigned to his alma mater, the University of Naples. The whole city turned out in fiesta, as only Neapolitans can, to welcome the Angel of the Schools. Two years later Pope Gregory summoned him to the Council of Lyons where his counsel was greatly in demand. Ever obedient to the voice of authority, Thomas hastened thither, but was taken seriously ill on the way and brought to the Cistercian monastery of Fossanuova. As he lay dying, he asked for the Cantic of Canticles, which he explained to the brethren gathered round his bedside. After that he received his Lord and departed this life March 7th, in 1274. Thus passed into Eternal Life the humble friar, Europe's greatest mind, whose whole career on earth was spent scattering the darkness of error and drawing souls to the Light of Truth.



# Saint Catherine of Siena

THE SERAPH-HEARTED

# SAINT CATHERINE AND THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

<i>Emperors</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
ALBERT I of Hapsburg, 1298-1308	Dawn of the Renaissance 1300 Boniface condemns King of France 1302	BONIFACE VIII, 1294-1303 BL. BENEDICT XI, 1303-1304
HENRY VII, 1308-1313	Birth of Brigid of Sweden 1303 Pope goes to Avignon 1308 Babylonian Captivity (1309-1377) 1309 Henry VII tries to revive the Holy Roman Empire 1310 German Council of Vienna 1311 Suppression of Knights Templar 1312	CLEMENT V, 1305-1314
LOUIS, 1314-1347	Pope quarrels with Emperor 1316 Death of Dante 1321 Pope's contest with Louis of Bavaria 1322 Defensio Pacis 1328	JOHN XXII, 1316-1334
CHARLES IV, 1347-1378	Hundred Years War begins 1337 Diet of Frankfort 1338 Birth of Chaucer 1340 Birth of Juliana of Norwich 1344 Battle of Crécy 1346 Birth of Catherine of Siena 1347 Black Death decimates Europe 1348 Brigid of Sweden in Rome 1350 Edward VIII and the Praemunire 1351	BENEDICT XII, 1334-1342 CLEMENT VI, 1342-1352
	Catherine's vow of virginity 1354 Rienzi slain by a mob 1354 William Langland c 1362 Catherine, a Dominican Tertiary 1363 Catherine's "Spiritual Espousals" 1366 Urban V leaves for Rome 1367	INNOCENT VII, 1352-1362 BL. URBAN V, 1362-1370
	Pope Urban returns to France 1370 Catherine's Visions 1370 Catherine receives the Stigmata 1375 Catherine, Ambassadress to Avignon 1376 Gregory XI goes to Rome 1377 Catherine reforms Republic of Siena 1377	GREGORY XI, 1370-1378
WENCESLAUS, 1378-1400	Urban VI summons Catherine to Rome 1378 Great Western Schism 1378 Catherine dies in Rome 1380 Birth of Bernardine of Siena 1380	URBAN VI, 1378-1379 BONIFACE IX, 1389-1404

## SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA AND THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

### *Evil Times Ensue*

Europe was now little more than a group of cocky, young nations fully aware of their power in a changing world. The common sense of Christendom was quite lost, the old respect for authority sadly lacking, and any hope of a Holy Roman Empire a thing of the past. All the restive states were out for more power, princes and parliaments alike sowing dragons' teeth for the years to come. No longer did the middle classes support the Popes; and many a ruler treated them with icy hatred. The great writers of the day, Dante, Chaucer, Langland, Petrarch, Boccaccio, held the melancholy mirror up to the times; while every nation in Europe deserved the reproof Dante administered his own country:

Ah, slavish Italy! thou inn of grief!  
Vessel without a pilot in loud storm!  
Lady no longer of fair provinces,  
But brothel-house impure!  
. . . while now thy living ones  
In thee abide not without war, and one  
Malicious gnaws another . . .<sup>1</sup>

Woeful was the day for Europe when Pope Clement V fled to Avignon, dragging the papacy after him into a veritable Babylonian Captivity. For no sooner was the Apostolic Chair removed from Rome, in 1308, than its occupants be-

<sup>1</sup> Purg. VI, 76

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

came the tools of the French monarchy, their court the scene of shameful degradation. The efforts of the Councils went for naught as all their reform programs failed to secure the solidarity of Christendom.

About the middle of the century the Black Death ravaged the West, bringing suffering, bitterness, sacrifice on an immense scale. This terrible pestilence, a putrid typhus, cost Europe twenty-five million lives; it is no exaggeration to say a third of the population perished in England, and the continent presented a picture of widespread ruin. The flower of manhood, institutions, civilization fell into decay while the people no longer considered their souls in the struggle for bare existence. One bright spot, the only one, was seen in the devotion of men of God who spent themselves in behalf of the thousands of sick and dying. But, alas, they too fell victim to the widespread spiritual decadence. The mendicant orders lost their early fervor; the sons of St. Francis fell prey to anarchy, partly political, partly theological; the sons of St. Dominic passed from an Order of Preachers to an order of inquisitors; secular clergy too, were just as deeply poisoned by the widespread degeneracy which appeared to be inescapable. It is perfectly true that Europe was quite rotten, ready for the utter breakdown which was now near at hand. Instead of guiding the Church through the valley of shadows the Popes failed in their high duty; as a result they forfeited the trust of monarchs, and lost through sinful neglect the faith of the millions. Too many of them had verified the Divine Master's dreadful prophecy, "The enemies of a man are those of his own household." The household of the faith was in desperate straits; though there were those who tried to set it in order, no one appeared big enough or brave enough for that herculean task. At last, in 1378, came the collapse, and the Church, split by schism,

## *Saint Catherine of Siena and the Fourteenth Century*

was bowed and broken, her time-honored authority reduced to a pitiable state.

### *Heart of Grace*

Near the middle of the century, Catherine Benincasa was born in feud-torn Siena, the daughter of Giacomo, a wood-dyer, and Lapa Piagenti, a good pious woman. The neighbors loved to borrow this little one for their personal delight, nicknaming her Eufrosina. When five, she manifested great devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and would kneel on each step of the stairs and recite a "Hail Mary." A year later she was vouchsafed a vision of Christ seated in the midst of His Apostles: "O brother!" she said to little Stephen who dragged at her hand, "if you saw what I see, you would never care to leave this spot." In that moment Catherine's vocation became fixed; she made a vow of chastity and began the practice of severe penance. Deep down in that young heart the flames of divine love were kindled, so that now more than ever she sought seclusion in her bedroom. Her mother, who adored her, also tormented the lovely girl, urging her to get married — a thing Catherine refused even to consider. She was aided no little by a gift of humor to which her adroit Tuscan tongue could give play when teased beyond reason; and many a time she had to make peace in that tumultuous household. Not only was the noisy brood of children a care, she also had to quiet her distracted mother who loved to display her temper by boxing ears all round. The stormy little home certainly served as an excellent training ground for this mysteriously gifted young girl. One day, when she had reached the marriageable age, Catherine took a shears and cut off her long beautiful hair, much to the annoyance of her parents who deprived the culprit of her

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

bedroom. But this shorn daughter of theirs made herself a little cell where she received wondrous visitations. Then came the time when with Giacomo's consent, Lapa no doubt agreeing, she assumed the habit of the Dominican Sisters of Penitence.

All through Catherine's girlhood years Siena underwent one revolution after another. The Bianchi (whites) and Neri (blacks) tore at one another's throats; the discords continued, as butchers, bakers, candle-stick makers took sides with Guelph or Ghibelline. "It would seem," says an historian, "as if in that terrible era, so disorderly, avaricious, revengeful, and violent, it was as much as a man could do to steer his way through it all without being privately poisoned or publicly executed, unless he managed to evade time by living in eternity in some hiding place of prayer." As much as a man could do! — but what of a young girl like Catherine with such high spirits and racy wit, who might have loved and been loved ruthlessly? The only answer is that God had set her apart for a singularly great work in his Church. She could play on Del'Oca street untouched by the Black Death that lingered in the highways and byways; she was equally unscathed by any moral contagion of impurity despite the fierce temptations that assailed her. As a Sister of Penitence, tending the most loathsome cases, she continued undaunted in that heroic work and her heart opened more and more to divine Life, Love and Truth. That she was confirmed by God from the very beginning there can be no question. "He commanded His angels concerning her, to keep her in all her ways; He covered her with His pinions and under His wings she could hide; so she needed not to be afraid of terror at night, of arrows which fly by daylight, of pestilence which creeps in the darkness."<sup>2</sup> Hers indeed was

<sup>2</sup> Ps. XC

### *Saint Catherine of Siena and the Fourteenth Century*

a heart of grace which, during tender girlhood, faced life's storm, weathered it, learned how it could be calmed, even in the great outer world. Amid the anarchy of that day, she dwelt like a hermitess in a chosen hiding place of prayer; even then Catherine had freely offered herself to God Who would one day enlarge her heart to embrace His world. "O Christ Love," she prayed, "Christ Love come into my heart!" One of her endearing terms for Our Lord was "Babbio mio"; she must have been very near to Mary, too, else how could she have merited to be called "this blessed virgin and mother of a thousand souls."

### *Cola Di Rienzi*

Italy from the very outset of the century, Catherine's Italy, had known nothing save riot and disorder. The city of Rome, torn with rivalries and conflicts, found no relief until the coming of Rienzi. This patriot, son of an innkeeper, was a man of great beauty and eloquence, steeped in the spirit of Dante and the eloquence of Cicero. The condition of the Rome he so loved, now only a ruin, stirred him to the depths, and he resolved to do all in his power to restore its ancient glory. His plans took life the day his brother was slain in a brawl between the Orsini and the Colonna factions. The Roman populace presently joined him and assisted in breaking the power of the barons. He made every effort at first to have the Popes return to the Chair of Peter, but failing in this he urged the papal vicar to back his measures for reform. By 1347 he was boldly calling himself a tribune and promulgating the "laws of the good estate." No more fortified houses or private garrisons; instead, the public safety was secured by river police on the Tiber, an armed ship to protect each port, and a police force which patrolled Rome's thirteen districts. The outlook certainly was bright,

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

but unfortunately Rienzi, dizzy with power and dreaming of a wider mission, began making fatal missteps. He summarily ordered the Pope and the Cardinals back from Avignon; summoned the two claimants of the Empire, Louis of Bavaria and Charles of Bohemia, to appear before his judgment-seat; and, most brazen of all, he allowed himself to be crowned with a mystic tiara of seven crowns. The papal vicar no longer supported his cause, so the intemperate tribune was forced to abdicate in 1347 and was fortunate in escaping with his life.

The next year Italy was visited by the terrible Black Death. It stalked through Siena and when the plague subsided, the beautiful city, like all Italy, lay prostrate. Rienzi meanwhile sought refuge in the court of Charles IV where he planned a new scheme of government which called for the expulsion of local tyrants from the Italian cities, and aimed to strip Pope and clergy of their temporal rule, besides providing that the Emperor live and rule from Rome. The plan, attractive enough on paper, was in that day anything but workable. A little later the reformer was arrested by the Emperor who sent him to Avignon, but the new pontiff Innocent VI (1352-1362) discerned many points of value in Rienzi's mixed plans. Ever since 1308 when Clement IV departed for Avignon, the states of the Church had gone from bad to worse; just now in the city itself powerful families had recovered their abandoned fortresses, whence they sallied forth to wage war and wreck the city. Evidently something must be done, so the papal vicar, Cardinal Alborno, approved Rienzi's methods of keeping order and putting the grandée tyrants out of the picture. On August 1, 1354, Rienzi returned to Rome in triumph. By the authority of the absentee Pope, he was made a senator with vested powers. He once more proceeded to clean house, doing a thorough job, driving out the mischief-

### *Saint Catherine of Siena and the Fourteenth Century*

making nobles and restoring the papal authority. All the cities of Romagna, and Bologna as well, followed suit; not so Milan where Bernabo Visconti made the papal legate eat the bull of excommunication, parchment, seal and all. As for Siena, the tumult continued apace with endless opposition and conspiracy. Rienzi's new government, however, had a short life; his love of luxury and the excessive taxation turned the populace against him. Again he attempted to escape but was recognized by the mob who slew him and dragged his corpse over the cobble-stones of the city he so loved.

### *The Young Mystic*

About the time Rienzi was effecting reforms for the second time in Rome, Catherine Benincasa became a Dominican tertiary. Siena, like Milan, seethed with excitement, nobles and common people joining against imperial forces. But Catherine had no part in all this; she was unwittingly being prepared for a more important work of reform which would come in God's good time. No doubt her parents regarded as quite impossible the aloof young woman who prayed long hours in her little cell or left Del'Oca street only to care for the sick. They knew nothing of the celestial visitations and the familiar conversations she had with Christ; nothing of her mystical experiences known as the "spiritual espousals." Had they seen her in trance, or glimpsed her second sight they would have been at their wit's end. But Catherine managed to keep them in the dark and they discovered little if anything of her remarkable inner life, hidden with Christ in God. What they did see was the young woman's personal charm which could subdue the hostile friars and suspicious sisters of her own order. More, they marvelled at the way she loved the most loathsome creatures, served the desperately poor, strove to convert sinners. They were

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

provoked, of course, at her refusal to eat, yet paused to consider that this strange daughter of theirs thrived on fasting. It was a fact, Catherine could go on living for long intervals with no food save Holy Communion, wholly absorbed in tasting and loving the sweetness of Christ. Even in her little cell, though suffering terrible physical pain, she appeared radiantly happy; nor was her spiritual influence confined to the Benincasa household; indeed, she had gathered together a little school of disciples, men and women, close-knit in bonds of mystical love. Our Lord Whom she served filled her mind so completely that Catherine saw Him in frequent visions; once with two crowns in His hands, one of pure gold the other full of thorns; asked to choose, the mystic took the crown of thorns and placed it on her head. In 1370, at the age of twenty-three she received a series of manifestations in which she had a vision of Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, and received a divine command to enter the public life of the world. So it came to pass that the young mystic became one of the most powerful peacemakers in Europe, a great reformer who influenced queens, preached a crusade, even gave counsel to the Vicar of Christ.

Try now to picture Catherine with her hero's heart going out into the world to do battle with evil. She began to dictate letters to men and women in all levels of life, exhorting them to lead better lives; and soon her inspired missives reached the princes of Italy as well as the leading authorities of the republics. The papal vicars at Rome could not help having deep respect for one with such great organizing ability, especially when they saw how pure were her aims to prevent civil war and heal the widespread bitterness. As if to seal her divine mission Our Lord bestowed on Catherine a wonderful privilege. While at Pisa in 1375 she received the Stigmata, five mystical wounds deeply engraved in her hands,

### *Saint Catherine of Siena and the Fourteenth Century*

feet and heart, but she prayed that they might be concealed from human eyes. The year 1377 was mostly spent in the work of reforming the country districts around Siena, and it was about this time that Catherine miraculously learned to write. Need we be surprised that the works of Catherine of Siena rank among the classics of the fourteenth century. No one has ever questioned the beauty of the Tuscan style in the "*Dialogues*," the "*Prayers*" or the collection of nearly four hundred letters still extant. And, remember, Italy's "immortals" lived in that day — Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, all of whose writings put together do not contain the wisdom of this woman whom God had so richly endowed. The sum and substance of the great mystic's teaching is this: "Man must ever abide in the cell of self-knowledge, which is the stable in which the traveller through time to eternity must be born again."

#### *In Far-Off England*

While Catherine was about God's work in Italy and France, there dwelt in England another great mystic, Juliana of Norwich. She was three years older than the Siena saint and her life was that of an anchoress; "a simple unlettered creature" she humbly describes herself, "living in the deadlie flesh." The Hundred Years War had run its first decade and when Juliana was only four the Black Death ravaged England. That same year Edward III invaded France where in the great battle of Crécy he paid dearly for victory. Over thirty thousand were slain, along with eleven princes and twelve hundred knights. Echoes of such happenings reached Juliana before she set out on her love-adventure and became a recluse in an out-of-the-way hermitage. Her aim was, of course, penance and prayer which "oneth the soul to God." She tells how the good Lord showed her "that it is full great pleasure to Him that a simple soul come to Him, plainlie

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

and homelie, . . . for in us is His homeliest home and His endless dwelling." Juliana doubtless felt the ache of the problem of life, and grief too for the sad pass to which England had come, yet she did not fear to peer into the mystery of sin and pain. "Our Good Lord," she wrote, "would not that the soul were afraid of this ugly sight (the misery of the world). But I saw not sin; for I believe it had no manner of substance, ne no part of being, ne it might not be known but by the pain that is caused thereof. . . . It is true that sin is the cause of all this pain; but all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well . . . we should know our own feebleness and mischief that we be fallen in by sin, to meek us, and make us cry to God for help and grace." The deep steadfast mystic makes no mistakes about the outside world, recluse though she is. Even from her leafy hermitage she sensed, just as Catherine did, a world of bitter ecclesiastical-political strife. The Babylonian captivity of the papacy still continued; Clement VI put forth unheard-of claims, taxing all Europe for revenues, aided of course by rulers equally greedy to fill their coffers. The nations, chary of the growing papal demands and resentful of French control at Avignon, showed steady resistance. Earlier, when Pope John XXII was in conflict with the Emperor, England passed the Statute of Provisors (1351) and the Statute of Praemunire (1353). What with the door shut in the face of Rome, the King, not the Pope, ruled the situation, while all English subjects were forbidden to appeal to any foreign tribunal in a cause that fell under the king's jurisdiction. The old custom of rendering homage to the papacy was also abandoned and the tribute King John had promised absolutely refused. That Juliana of Norwich envisioned all this defection from old Catholic days is beyond any doubt. None the less the English woman had no fear, only trust that all would be

### *Saint Catherine of Siena and the Fourteenth Century*

well. Her "Revelations" contain the bright note of comfort, comfort amid every affliction: "O my dear darlings," she exclaims, "we needs, indeed, must toil and live the pilgrim life, but inside it all is love and love is motherly and merciful. The way is long, but He is the Way, and whate'er betide, wit it well, Love is His meaning." Who can miss in all this the spirit of a valiant woman with clear intellect and a sweet nature. She cared so much, this great mystic, for all the world from which she hid to suffer and make reparation.

### *Agents of Peace*

Italy, even as England, seared and scarred, seethed with disorder and unrest, her people united as one against the French. It irked them that the Pope should abide in a foreign land and rule the Church under the ægis of the foreign monarchs. When Catherine was in her teens Pope Innocent VII, it is true, introduced drastic reforms in the court at Avignon. He sent absentee bishops back to their sees, while still remaining away from his own. His successor, Blessed Urban V, moved by the condition into which Rome had fallen, determined to go back to the Eternal City. The time, he felt, was ripe, and the papal vicar, Albornoz, had paved the way. "O wicked Pope," protested his weakling French cardinals, "O impious father! whither does he drag his sons?" They ran into trouble at Viterbo, and once in Rome the Pope encountered hostile factions, bent on making life miserable for his court. The citizens insulted his French attendants with curses and threats, so hindering his own efforts that Urban decided to return to Avignon. Cries of protest arose far and wide from the faithful; the royal voices of Pedro of Aragon and the Swedish princess, St. Brigid, were raised in vain. Urban left Italy in 1370 only to die at Avignon the same year. "He would have been reckoned

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

among the most glorious of men," wrote Petrarch, "if he had caused his dying bed to be laid before the altar of St. Peter. . . ." Over all these heart-breaking doings Catherine must have grieved exceedingly. But a predestined work lay ahead; now in her early twenties she had grown amazingly in grace and vision. Very soon all men would see the Siena mystic's power of initiative and action employed by Heaven for its own ends.

In 1370 the easy-going Peter Roger de Beaufort succeeded the gentle Urban. As Gregory XI, most of his efforts, be it said, were devoted to Italy which he began to rule though *in absentia*. When the papal districts and cities resorted to revolt, Gregory sent Robert of Geneva with an army of Bretons. A league had been formed in Florence against the Holy See, and Catherine of Siena was empowered to negotiate a peace. All the way to France this frail mystic journeyed, determined to put the matter before Pope Gregory. With her extraordinary powers of subduing opponents she cut the red tape of the court and secured an audience. Grit to the core, with an eloquence that came from above, Catherine urged, rebuked, reproved, advised. . . . "Do as you have promised God!" she enjoined Gregory, thus proving that she alone knew of the secret promise he had made. Then, bravely, she made known to the Pope all his errors and weakness, pointing out that his presence in Rome was imperative. She assured him that the tyranny of the papal legates who held the whip hand had caused a revolt in Campagna, and all would surely be lost unless the Pope himself would return and take command. Lay courtiers, clerical courtiers tried to stay her but to no purpose; this woman of Siena who did not fear the fierce condottieri was not one to quail before any array of sycophants and satellites. On January, 1377, Gregory, seeing at last the peril that threatened the Holy

### *Saint Catherine of Siena and the Fourteenth Century*

See, made his way to Rome. The pitiful state of the city must have shocked him beyond words; its glory had departed, naught remained but neglected buildings and a population reduced to thirty thousand, most of whom lived in abject poverty. What mattered the welcome he received, when mobs still ruled the Eternal City, and his French cardinals met with every sort of insult? Day after day the situation became more intolerable, hatred and violence ruled in the streets, so Gregory made up his mind to return to Avignon. But before he could carry out his plans, they carried him to his grave, the victim of a fatal illness. Thus the Babylonian captivity came to an end, as inglorious as its beginning.

#### *Care of Souls*

Catherine's character unfolded amazingly during those years spent in the midst of the world. The Tuscan saint showed a many-sided genius: she was simple, sweet, utterly childlike, and at the same time shrewd, stern, with a rare gift for organization. Her supernatural endowments of vision and wisdom raised her head and shoulders over anybody living in that century. Nobody knew better the intricacies of those stormy times, nor had anyone her unique gift for peace-making. As a statesman she proved most influential, setting more than one Pope on the right road, admonishing rulers, restoring peace and quiet. After having pacified the Church, she attempted the herculean task of bringing peace to Italy. At Florence, the storm-center, she strove to bring the conflicting parties to an understanding for the good of their country. The whole future of Italy, she assured them, was at stake; let them cease this fratricidal struggle. But the murders and confiscations continued despite all her heroic efforts. One band set out to murder the Sienese peacemaker who would gladly have given her

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

life that peace might be restored among her beloved, though erring, countrymen. That crown of thorns you see on her head is a true symbol of the love she had for her native land; of her willingness to go to any length of pain and suffering to win her people back to God and to His Vicar on earth. "No, I have not sought vain glory," she could truly say, "but only the glory and praise of God."

It is as an apostle, bent upon winning all sorts of men and women to God, that Catherine is best loved and admired. For Neri, the sensitive poet, she had a motherly love; even for the poor cancer-ridden hag who poured out spite and malice on her blessed benefactor. When a hot-headed young Italian was condemned to death, she stuck to the rebel till the very end, doing all that his mother could have done to caress and comfort him, so that he was able to enter eternity "with cries of victory on his severed breath." She often read the riot act to those she secretly admired, such as the stubborn English hermit who would not leave his shack in the woods when she ordered him to go to Rome. Then there was her confessor, Fra Raymond, for whom she had the deepest love and reverence; yet she could chide the retiring friar, and encourage him in almost the same conversation. Among her devoted friends was a certain Stefano, who records an intimate conversation revealing Catherine's tireless care of souls. "That most holy virgin," he relates, "said to me in secret: 'Know, most beloved son, that the greatest desire thou hast will soon be fulfilled.' At this I was astonished for I could think of nothing that I longed for in the world; . . . therefore I said: 'O dearest Mother, what is the greatest desire that I have?' 'Look,' she said, 'into thy heart.' And I answered her: 'Certainly, most beloved Mother, I can find no greater desire in myself than to keep always near you.' And she straightway replied: 'And this will be.'" Such was

## *Saint Catherine of Siena and the Fourteenth Century*

the tender-hearted mother of a thousand souls, who bent superiors to her will, cowed the roughest highwayman, and spent her life winning souls to God.

### *The Great Western Schism*

After the death of Gregory XI, the Romans decided that a successor to the Chair of Peter should be elected in Rome. Oddly enough, though the majority of the Cardinals were French, the ballot went to an Italian from Naples. All Europe rubbed its eyes when the new Pope, Urban VI, no respecter of persons, settled down to do a thorough job of reform. He lost no time in calling the cardinals to order, and bluntly announced his intention of seeing things bettered at once. For Avignon interference he had only contempt and he swore that, if need be, he would create enough Italian cardinals to render French influence nugatory. By and by the French prelates secretly made tracks for Avignon, the chamberlain of the papal court bearing away the tiara. Back in France, they set up as anti-Pope, Clement VII, a ruthless, indomitable character, close-knit to the royal houses of Europe. And thus the Great Western Schism began, while in the ensuing confusion, even great saints differed as to who was the real Pope. Catherine of Siena and Brigid of Sweden, the greatest mystics of the age, declared for Urban, while Vincent Ferrer and Peter of Luxemburg, both holy men, held out for Clement. All Europe was divided in allegiance. For Urban — Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Flanders, and the Catholic Orient; for Clement — France, Savoy, Aragon, Castile, England, Scotland and Wales. But Urban held on grimly, resorting to brutal methods to gain his ends. At this stage of the conflict, behold, the fearless Catherine of Siena again enters the lists. It pained her deeply to hear that Urban, now a fanatic

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

for reform, had not only alienated Naples, but tortured and then executed six of his Cardinals who regarded him as half-mad. Immediately the great woman took up her pen for the cause of peace: "Accomplish your task with moderation," she wrote Urban. "For the love of Christ crucified, curb these sudden impulses prompted by your nature." Her words, sad to say, had little effect on the harsh, unhappy pontiff who continued arrogant as ever, and utterly devoid of tact or tolerance.

A year before his death Urban VI summoned Catherine to Rome. It was her destiny to spend the rest of her life there, trying to reform the Church. The Bark of Peter seemed to have been laid upon her frail shoulders, yet she begged Christ to let her bear the punishment for the sins of the world, the Italian world in particular. Her strength rapidly failed, as the crushing burden bore her down with its sheer weight, and for the three months, from Sexagesima until the Sunday before the Ascension, the great mystic endured a prolonged agony with exultant spirit. She died in Rome and was buried in the Church of Minerva. Her relics found their way to Siena, some to Paris to be lost later in the Revolution of 1793.

The great tragedy of the fourteenth century was summed up by Catherine of Siena: "The depths of calamity," she sorrowfully declared, "have overwhelmed the Church!" How could it be otherwise when Pope and anti-Pope ruled the dismal scene for more than forty years. The clergy, deeply rooted in laziness, forgot their duty of becoming first among men in virtue and learning. Two bishops might be heard claiming the same see, rival abbots the self-same monastery, priests contending for the one parish church. No longer was wisdom and the fields of progress the domain of the Church as in preceding centuries. The religious decay, hastened by the schism, was never remedied; its issue would be the de-

### *Saint Catherine of Siena and the Fourteenth Century*

struction of the religious unity of Europe. From time to time, it is true, brave attempts were made to restore peace but they appear to have accomplished nothing. Try as some Popes might, plan as did theologians, their efforts only resulted in confusion the worse confounded. The big thing now was commercial and secular interest, and men everywhere questioned the guidance of the Holy See.

The Pope who succeeded Urban VI was the Neapolitan Boniface IX who during a sixteen-year reign effected little if any reform. Both intellectually and religiously the Europe that formed one vast republic had radically, irretrievably changed. The power and majesty of Rome gave way before a time-spirit charged with mockery and worldliness, the spirit of the Renaissance. And along with that the development of the modern dialect, the consolidation of modern states not only shattered the old European cosmopolitanism but threatened the very perpetuity of the Church's unity. Old ideas lost their hold over many minds and hearts, as the Mother of the Ages ceased to see herself reflected in the lives of her children.



# Saint Joan of Arc

SAVIOR OF FRANCE

# SAINT JOAN OF ARC AND THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

<i>Emperors</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
WENCESLAUS, 1378-1400	Dawn of the Renaissance 1400	BONIFACE IX, 1389-1404
	France at odds with the Papacy 1406	INNOCENT VII, 1404-1406
SIGISMUND, 1411-1437	Council of Pisa 1409	GREGORY XII, 1406-1409
	Turks on the eastern border of Europe 1410	ALEXANDER V, 1409-1410
	Teutonic Knights defeated at Tannenberg 1410	JOHN XXIII, 1410-1415
	Birth of Joan of Arc 1412	
	Council of Constance (1414-1418) 1414	
	Huss burned at the stake 1415	
	Troubles in Bohemia 1418	MARTIN V, 1417-1431
	Second Generation of Humanists 1420	
	Joan hears heavenly voices 1425	
	University of Louvain 1425	
	Joan saves Orleans 1429	
	Charles VII crowned at Rheims 1429	
	Joan a prisoner 1430	
	Council of Basle (1431-1439) 1431	EUGENE IV, 1431-1447
	Joan condemned and burned at Rouen 1431	
	New Age of painting, sculpture, architecture 1435	
ALBERT II (Hapsburg), 1438-1439	Council of Florence 1439	
FREDERICK III, 1440-1493	Year of Jubilee in Rome 1450	NICHOLAS V, 1447-1455
	Rapid spread of the New Learning 1450	
	Birth of Savonarola 1452	
	Fall of Constantinople 1453	
	Real Date of the Renaissance 1453	
	Vatican Library grows 1454	
	Birth of Reuchlin 1455	CALLISTUS III, 1455-1458
	Joan of Arc declared innocent 1456	
	First Bible in print 1456	
	Pius II starts futile crusade against the Turks 1464	PIUS II, 1458-1464
	Art of Printing makes rapid progress 1465	PAUL II, 1464-1471
	Hungarians defeat the Mohammedans 1469	
	Castle united to Aragon 1470	
	New Learning reaches Germany 1470	SIXTUS IV, 1471-1484
	Sistine Chapel is beautified 1475	
	Torquemada Grand Inquisitor 1483	
MAXIMILIAN, 1493	Turks capture Otranto 1483	
	Birth of Martin Luther 1483	
	Wars of the Roses 1485	INNOCENT VIII, 1484-1492
	Savonarola preaches throughout Italy 1490	
	Birth of Ignatius Loyola 1491	
	Columbus discovers America 1492	
	Spain expels the Jews 1492	
	Conquest of Granada 1492	ALEXANDER VI, 1492-1503
	New Learning reaches England 1496	
	Death of Charles VIII 1498	
	Savonarola burned at stake 1498	
	Machiavelli holds office 1498	

## SAINT JOAN OF ARC AND THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

### *Herald of Heaven*

It was a century of travail, this fifteenth, reeking with the pride of life and the conceit of learning. "An Emperor of Germany, always drunk, going on a visit to an insane King of France for the purpose of deposing a Pope." In those acid-etched lines you get a cross-section of the godless state of things. The Middle Ages had come to a close in a din of war, and Europe, torn from the Church, was on the way to becoming secular. There was disloyalty, disobedience and revolt against authority. Old studies, which had never perished, underwent renewal; a pagan renewal, however, cynical, sensuous, subversive of faith and morals. Rebels abounded, but no truly great religious reformers capable of renewing the Christian spirit. The Sultan, Mohammed II, could whip his horse through the holy Church of Santa Sophia—an outrage which would have stirred a Crusade in the old days, but now only created a stir. Do not think the conditions were passing; they had come to stay. And do not think the relations of the secular State and the Divine Church could easily be reconciled; by now they were mutually exclusive. "No man can serve two masters. . . ." That was the clear-cut issue of those days. But the faith had grown cold; "the children of this world were wiser in their generation than the children of light." More still, the Hundred Years War, with its wear and tear on the souls of men

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

left deep scars and fresh wounds; by 1429 the English held the north of France and were besieging Orleans. Even now the rope that kept England from overrunning France was badly frayed, and the struggle obviously could not last much longer.

If there ever was a time for the appearance of a savior it was then. All signs pointed to the impending doom of France when Joan of Arc entered the picture. The peasant girl made it clear that her mission was two-fold, to preserve the independence of France and to save her people for Catholic Christendom. A marvellous scene unfolded as the Maid, clad in armor, rode to relieve the siege of Orleans. One hope remained, and it was one that Joan knew Heaven could and would bring to fruition — Victory for France. An alert, inspiring leader, she entered the city and whipped a broken army into action; they went out and attacked, then drove the English from the Loire, Auxerre, Troyes and Chalons. In less than three months Charles VII was crowned in Rheims. Joan, an emissary of heaven, had proclaimed her inspired plan; a crusader *sans peur et sans reproche*, she actually accomplished it. When she took up the sword, France was a beaten nation, but before she died, a martyr to truth, she had rescued her beloved country from the clutch of the invader and saved it from schism. If the French had been vanquished, they surely would have joined the victor, England, when the Tudor heretics, united with the French Huguenots, sought to wipe out the Church. We can thank God that the Land of the Lilies was not conquered; and under God, the glory goes to one of her own daughters, a devout country girl. For it was this seventeen-year-old who succeeded where Europe's military genius failed; she won out for the reason that a power not of this world stood behind

## *Saint Joan of Arc and the Fifteenth Century*

her; a power which revealed itself in the piety, heroism, and deathless devotion of the immortal Maid.

### *Maid of France*

Joan was the daughter of James d'Arc and Isabelle Romée, God-fearing folk who cultivated their small landed property at Domremy, in Lorraine. They were pious, hospitable people of spotless reputation, with a family of five children, three boys and two girls, Joan and Catherine. Their humble cottage looked out upon a vineyard, a stable for cows, and fields where the children tended sheep. Like so many great saints before her, Joan spent her early days in prayer and contemplation, which brought the child into close union with the Unseen. Did she not, even then, have visions of the All-Father of Whom another shepherd sang:

I am God, thy God!  
I know all the birds of the mountains  
Every wild beast of the forest is mine  
And the roaming throngs of the plane are in my mind.<sup>1</sup>

The flocks of His pasture, too, were men, as the little shepherdess clearly saw; and she ardently longed to restore to Him "those flocks of beautiful sheep." But alas, anyone with half an eye could see how multitudes, like crazy sheep, wandered far from the Good Shepherd, farther and farther from the fold of salvation. Bear in mind that Joan was no dull, aloof child, given to idle dreams. It is true she possessed little practical schooling, having been taught only the Our Father, Hail Mary and the Apostles' Creed; but she could sew, knit and spin, besides being able to take part in the

<sup>1</sup> Ps. L, 7-10

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

rustic dances and sing the little songs so dear to the French heart. No teener in Domremy could manage a horse with such skill, and she could hold her own in the village races with all the dexterity of a knight in battle.

Joan, just the same, was grave beyond her years, nowise inclined to idle talk, yet beloved by all villagers because of her steady attention to the sick and her deep love of the poor. As she grew up to maidenhood amid these rustic surroundings, it was seen that she was singularly obedient, chaste, modest, patient, and very gentle. She was humble, too, and prudent; traits which would soon show when destiny ushered her into the active life of the great world about her. At thirteen she appeared to have lost interest in those amusements so attractive to girls, preferring to repair alone to the Church when her work was done and pray fervently to God and the Blessed Mother. Not far from Domremy was a tiny chapel, the Hermitage of St. Mary, which she was wont to visit on Saturdays to intercede in behalf of her much-tried France. An irresistible desire would drive her there when her parents thought she was occupied in the fields, and little could they conceive that this daughter was set apart to be France's greatest soldier and patriot. All the natives of Domremy were Armagnacs, devoted to the cause of Charles VII, while in the neighboring villages of Maxey, the inhabitants supported the English-minded Burgundians. One day the boys of Domremy got the worst of it in a battle with the Maxey youth, and returned home wounded and bleeding. Joan, a patriot to the core, expressed her violent detestation of the compromising Burgundians and all their ilk, declaring that any Domremian who would have truck with the traitors deserved to lose his head, if such were the will of the Lord. That single incident furnishes a clue to the brave young heart; the trials of her beloved France she pondered deeply,

## *Saint Joan of Arc and the Fifteenth Century*

for she loved the people, and stormed heaven for victory when she prayed in the village church and in the hermitage.

### *Call From on High*

The Hundred Years War was pressing heavily on France, when Joan in her mid-teens received her first heavenly visitations. On a summer day in 1424 while at work in her father's garden, she suddenly beheld a dazzling light on the right side of the village church, and an unknown voice whispered in her ear. The voice told her to go often to the church, to be always good and virtuous, and for the rest to rely on the protection of Heaven. Joan, struck with fear, was none the less certain that the voice came from Heaven, and in token of gratitude she took a vow of virginity, consecrating herself to God's cause. A little while after this the Domremy maid heard the same voice and an Archangel appeared and revealed to her some startling things. She was told that the Heart of God felt great pity towards France, and that it was imperative she should go to the King's assistance; that she was the one to raise the siege of Orleans and deliver Charles from his enemies; that it was necessary she should present herself to Baudricourt, captain of Valcouleurs, who would see that she met the King without encountering any obstacle; that St. Catherine and St. Marguerite would visit her, since they had been chosen to guide and assist her with their advice; and that she must believe and obey them in all they should prescribe, such being the will of the Omnipotent. These things Joan pondered in her heart, saying nothing to anybody. Then in 1428 when the "voices" became more insistent that she go forth and save France, she made her way to Robert Baudricourt who commanded the army of Charles VII. At that time the King's army had met with bitter reverses in the battles of Crevant and Verneuil. One

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

can readily understand why the battle-worn soldier simply laughed at Joan's story. "Take her home to her father," he scoffed, "and give her a good whipping!" Back to Domremy the elect girl returned, but the French meanwhile suffered even more severe reverses. That same year the English marched on Orleans to the despair of King Charles who saw nothing in store for his army save complete defeat.

Very soon the "voices" became more urgent, to the point of threat. "I am a poor girl," Joan protested. "I do not know how to ride or fight!" The truth is she did not know how to ride in battle array, yet Heaven willed that she should. So for the second time Joan took the path to Valcouleürs. She found the French commander in a different mood; and under her persistent pleading he began to lose his doubts. The thing was settled once for all when Joan mysteriously informed him of the actual defeat of French arms outside Orleans, and a few days later he received official news of the event. Won over at last, the bewildered Baudricourt gave her an escort of three men-at-arms and a military permit to see the King in person. Now Charles VII, a defeatist at heart, thought to test her out by disguising himself. But when the maid entered the crowded court she pushed knights and soldiers aside, and made straight for the monarch. And as if that brave adventuring were not enough proof, she astounded the King by a secret sign known only to those two, a sign which convinced him that she was no dreamer. It is significant of Charles' soddren inaction that even then he delayed while Joan was sent to Poitiers to be examined by a council of bishops and doctors. They could find nothing objectionable against the girl; on the contrary, all were deeply impressed by her ardent faith, transparent earnestness and sterling honesty. After the verdict of the council had favored the Domremy maid, they recommended she be given

## *Saint Joan of Arc and the Fifteenth Century*

a chance to prove herself. Let her go forth on this mission and the future would show whether the revelations were really heavenly or whether the whole thing was just a silly hoax.

### *Maid at Arms*

Back in Chinon, Joan of Arc, full of faith in her "voices," girded herself for battle. Behold the seventeen-year-old girl clad in helmet and mail, like any soldier of France. When Charles offered her a special sword she gently declined, a gesture that must have set the company back on their heels. Think of it, refusing the monarch's gift! They had scarcely recovered their wits when Joan gave the cool command that they fetch an ancient sword buried behind the altar in the chapel of St. Catherine. Ah, they told themselves, this would show her up — an old sword which nobody had ever heard of! One can imagine their puzzlement when the sword was dug up in the very spot named by the soldier-maid. There was something else; she had to have a standard bearing the words Jesus, Maria, with the picture of God the Father, and adoring angels holding forth a *fleur-de-lis*. Thus armed and accoutred, Joan, ready for war, rode out for Orleans at the head of a chosen troop. The modest maid must have felt acutely the strangeness of her position, astride a war-horse and bent for battle to the death, yet she faced it uncowering. One of the most thrilling scenes in history is Joan of Arc at the head of those rough cavalymen who up till then had known little of true leadership, and who must have regarded the panoplied Maid as a veritable messenger from Heaven. And Joan rode on, nothing daunted, instinct with prayer and deathless hope. It was not her own will she was obeying. It was a higher Will that bade her go forth and snatch her beloved homeland from the clutches of a ruthless foe.

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

The struggle between France and England, begun in 1337, was now in its ninety-second year. With Orleans all but captured, it seemed too late for the French to remedy their mistakes. Then an astounding thing happened. Joan of Arc appeared on the scene and forthrightly summoned the English to withdraw their troops and return home at once! Withdraw? Retreat? When in two months they had won more than fifteen towns! The overseas commanders were infuriated but their anger gave way to shock when the Maid, in a rapid troop movement, bypassed the enemy force and swung into Orleans, *fleur-de-lis* flying. Hope rode high in the garrison as the slip of a girl they called Pucelle took over like a veteran commander and began to capture one by one the English forts around the city. No longer could the English outsmart the French whom they used to regard as military failures. This was a new army, an utterly different army, which outcharged them time and again, delivering hammer blows without cease, forcing them back at every charge. Then, in the thick of the fight, just before the last fort fell, Joan received an arrow in her breast. The valiant Maid made little of her wound, for she wanted to continue the campaign, her "voices" having told her she had but a year to live. They must carry on, she urged, fight, fight, fight without delay! But the listless, heavy-footed King and his middle-of-the-road advisers, cursed with apathy, stood in her way. Joan finally succeeded in forcing them to go out to battle, and the English were decisively routed at Patay. That victory opened the road to Rheims by way of Troyes; and again the Maid had to drive the laggard captains before they captured the place and marched on to the great cathedral city. On Sunday July 17, 1429, Charles was crowned at Rheims, Joan of Arc standing by and fondling her blessed standard. "As it shared in the toil," she ex-

## *Saint Joan of Arc and the Fifteenth Century*

plained, "it was just that it should share in the victory." This lightning campaign, you will recall, the soldier Maid had foreseen three months earlier, even the detail of her wound and the crowning of Charles VII.

### *Trial and Death*

After this brilliant triumph Joan wanted to return home to her simple life in Domremy. She may have been deterred from this by two aims; to drive the English out of France, and to overcome the deadening apathy of the King and his advisers. Her next exploit was to lead the troops to the siege of Paris, which she felt had been too long in English hands. All went well for a time and the French had already occupied St. Denis when a bolt from a cross-bow pierced Joan's thigh. They carried her from the field, and the French, lacking her inspiring leadership, abandoned the assault. It was a craven's attempt at compensation when Charles ennobled the Maid and her family, for he had meanwhile signed a truce with the Duke of Burgundy. Still more saddening, the year Heaven allotted to Joan was swiftly passing, and the "voices" told her she would be taken prisoner before Midsummer Day. On May 24th, therefore, she plunged anew into the fray valiantly defending Compiègne when the Burgundians attacked. By either treachery or stupidity the drawbridge was raised while she was in command of a sortie yet she continued to fight with unshaken constancy. But when the English charged on the French squadrons many, paralyzed with fear of abandonment, quit the field leaving Joan to defend herself. Quickly a dozen soldiers surrounded and pressed upon the lone battler who contended grimly until seized and dragged from her horse. They conducted the Maid, a prisoner, to Marigny where she was placed under strong guard. The prisoner's one thought was to effect an

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

escape and rejoin her army in Compiègne. She was on the point of gaining her liberty when the keeper of the castle compelled her to re-enter the prison. This bitter experience was met with becoming patience, Joan declaring that apparently it was not the will of God that she should that time escape. Hard on this blow came another when she learned that the King would not lift a finger to save his defender from her fate. Few events in all history stir one to such righteous contempt as the cowardly attitude the royal ingrate maintained. He might have made some attempt to rescue the Maid or offered an exchange of prisoners. He did nothing but let her go to her death.)

One of the saddest dramas the world has seen was the Anglo-French trial of Joan of Arc. For the English, too, played craven, their every move cowardly beyond belief. They clapped the prisoner-of-war into an iron cage in the Castle of Rouen, nor did they remove the chains from her neck, hands and feet long enough to let her attend Mass. The guards purposely selected were half-drunken dissolute soldiers, who insulted the Maid, even attempting to violate her chastity. No means were too foul, no resource too shameful for her captors who feared her with a superstitious fear and resolved to have her life at all costs. They had no right in the first place to detain her in a secular prison when her case was one to be tried by an ecclesiastical court; that was the law of the day, but it meant nothing to the English. And when the time came for the proceedings at Rouen, they chose as chief judge the cowardly Pierre Chaucon, Bishop of Beauvais, deadly enemy of the royal party, and a puppet of the Burgundians. They even denied the prisoner the services of an advocate, yet Joan proved to be more than a match for her questioners. The radiant captive, purified by sufferings, stood as an angel of light conducting her own

## *Saint Joan of Arc and the Fifteenth Century*

defence in that dark court; her delicacy of perception and frankness in rejoinder amazed the onlookers. But no sooner did she gain sympathizers than the court decided to hold the rest of the inquiry in prison. Behind closed doors they resorted to every form of artifice and browbeating known to tricky lawyers only to be set back on their heels. The travesty of justice came to a close when Chaucon read aloud these words of doom:

It is therefore on this account, we, being on our tribunal, declare, by our present sentence, that you are a relapse and a heretic; we pronounce you a rotten member, and as such, in order that you may not corrupt others, we declare you cast out and cut off from the Church; and we deliver you over to the secular power. . . .

Then followed the final infamy when the civil powers ordered Joan of Arc to be burned at the stake and her ashes to be thrown into the Seine. Joan's courage at the pyre moved even her bitterest foes to tears; she begged for a cross, embraced it, and as the flames licked at her pure body called continuously on the name of Jesus. Thus died the Maid of France, feared by the evil of heart, betrayed by her own, yet declaring to the very end her "voices" came from God and had not deceived her. They had not, as history unmistakably proved. Four years after Joan's martyrdom the treaty of Arras reconciled France and Burgundy; the very next year the city of Paris fell before the Burgundian army; and shortly thereafter the English faded across the channel to their island homeland.

### *The New Learning*

Joan's standard, as we have seen, bore the words, Jesus, Maria, with a picture of kneeling angels presenting a *fleur-de-lis* to God the Father. If France — and Europe — had

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

but pondered that standard, the story of these times might have been one of triumph instead of tragedy. For tragedy it was from start to finish, and history was taking a turn that no man could have foreseen. A century earlier when Rienzi ruled, he had dreams of a brave new Roman world and started a movement, "Back to the Ancients." But the Church gave too little heed to that spirit which carried the dynamite of moral destruction. After the fall of Constantinople, scholars from the East came to Rome, while Italians journeyed to Byzantium to garner the exotic treasures. They brought back a wealth of Eastern thought that slowly fashioned Western minds, eager to escape into a world of gods and goddesses. The Greek and Latin classics easily captured men's minds, and pagan ways won the hearts of multitudes. Such writers as Petrarch actually believed they lived in the dawn of a golden age; the New Learning, they claimed, must displace the Old Religion! Ideas clothed with beauty bade fair to rule out the time-honored ideas of God and the Supernatural. The people no longer heeded the Gospel, so intent were they on imitating the ancient heathens. Law was carelessly cast aside, duty scoffed at, conscience scorned. No wonder, then, that the sanctity of life and the rights of others had such scant appeal; and as with men, so with the State, a law unto itself, no moral code was recognized, and the teachings of the Church were ignored. These dreadful facts showed that the worm was swiftly eating its way into the heart of Christendom.

Had the Church been able to direct the New Learning into Christian channels the story of Modern Europe would have been different. But the Church was divided, and her influence at a low point. Why, we ask, did not Rome raise a hand to stay Joan of Arc's execution? And why did the Pope fail to reverse the decision of the ecclesiastical court that

## *Saint Joan of Arc and the Fifteenth Century*

condemned her? The answer is a sad one. There were no truly "Greats" in the Chair of Peter; the days of the stern Gregory, the strong Nicholas and the lofty Innocent were no more. Even the clergy had lost caste by heeding the things of the earth, instead of the things of God. The laity far surpassed them in knowledge, consequently in power, for it was an age that worshipped knowledge and coveted power. Every feebly attempted Catholic reform was sandbagged by the Humanist spirit, so gay and frivolous, so tenacious and hostile; the New Order had no place for what was truly sacred, no room for spiritual authority. Men chose their own ideals and followed their own ways, which definitely were not the ways of righteousness. The tide of sin ran swift and strong; even the sense of sinfulness gave way to a vaunting pride of life as the standard of virtue fell before the pagan worship of beauty. Still more tragic, Humanism on the march invaded the ranks of the clergy, secularizing the monk and the bishop, even secularizing the papacy as it secularized everything.

### *Spread of Humanism*

As early as the Council of Constantinople (1414-1418) you can see the spirit of the New Learning leavening the faithful. And in the Council of Florence (1439) attended by the Greeks, the humanist Valla warned the Latins against speaking of the Apostles' Creed as an apostolic composition. This same Valla who had fled to Rome to escape the Inquisition, worked in the Vatican Library, which after the fall of Constantinople had become the first library in the world. With the papal collection of five thousand manuscripts and countless other works, it was indeed a magnet for scholars of every description. To Rome, therefore, the penniless Humanists flocked and received welcome, not to say profitable

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

employment, until forced in 1450 to migrate to Germany where they slowly extended the New Learning. A few universities — Vienna, Heidelberg, Erfurt — accepted their teachings, while others, like Cologne, refused them entrance. The exponents of the New Order meanwhile flaunted their intellectual vanity, indulged their scented self-complacency and delighted in the sway of evil. Their shady ideas steadily filtered down to the level of the masses, poisoning the faith and morals of the millions. It is worth noting here that most of their writings lie buried, save when the modern sensualist publishers disinter the ugly bones, while the life-giving book of Thomas à Kempis, "The Imitation of Christ," is read in a hundred languages. Need it be said that its author, living in the heart of the New Learning, proved the greatest religious writer that ever existed. Note this, too, most of the Humanists of the Renaissance are forgotten yet the innocent unlettered Maid of Orleans, raised to the altars of the Church, stirs millions of souls to great deeds for God and His Church.

There were in those days two classes of Humanists. There was the group of Catholic philosophers, all too few, who welcomed the treasures of the past and labored to Christianize them. They recognized a Christian as well as a pagan antiquity, pointing out how largely the Early Church depended on Greek writings, and they aimed to make clear what the Eastern Fathers had done with Plato, and St. Thomas of Aquino with Aristotle. The heathen-minded Humanists, on the contrary, had no use for the Christian past, preferring the Greek, Arabic, Syriac, in fact, all the Oriental culture. Easy to see that their ideas made for the destruction of the Bulwark which for twelve centuries stood as a defense of the faith and civilization of Christendom. Like so many pagan writers in our own day, they bragged about their low ideals,

## *Saint Joan of Arc and the Fifteenth Century*

voiced their impatience of Christianity. Take just a few of the exponents of the New Learning, highly regarded in that day. "Pope and Emperor," boasted Aeneas Silvius, "are nothing but fictitious names and splendid figureheads." Lorenzo Valla, leader of the Italian Humanists, wallowed in religious scepticism, and displayed his moral indifference. Poggio plumed himself on his ability — among many other indecencies — to mock the clergy. Filelfo indited satires too vile for print, while Ficino boasted the license of obscene language which he miscalls freedom of speech. There were many others like them, bred in conceit, nourished in pride, bent on sheer gratification of the senses. Is it any wonder then that the condition of society grew worse and worse as the days went on?

### *Popes Become Humanist*

By the second generation of Humanists, many churchmen had joined their ranks. Pope Martin V (1417-1431) might declare, "While we have Augustine, what care we for the sagacity of Aristotle, the eloquence of Plato, the prudence of Varro? We do not need these men. Augustine is enough for us." Yet the grim facts showed that Augustine had little appeal for an age so corrupt, so barbarous in the midst of its culture. And before long it appeared only too obvious that the Popes themselves had weakened, yielded to the time-spirit and gone Humanist. For instance, Eugene IV, exiled to Florence where the Renaissance was at its height, fostered the pagan spirit instead of religiously renewing the face of the earth. At his court was Aeneas Silvius, the brilliant but dissolute secretary of the Emperor Frederick, who earlier had scoffed at both Pope and Emperor. But it was Nicholas V who outshone him as apostle of the arts by adorning not only Rome but other cities with magnificent buildings. This

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

son of a country physician, himself a scholar, loved the company of the learned and planned that Rome should be the world center of culture as well as of religion. Bent upon building up the Vatican library, he collected, coned and catalogued every available manuscript. To his credit as the chief priest in Christendom it can be said that he made heroic efforts to unit the West in a crusade against the Turk — only to fail dismally. "Why do we rob our children of bread," the Germans complained, "while the Christian pontiff spends the treasure of St. Peter on stones and mortars?" The man who occupied the papal chair in 1458 was Pius II, none other than Silvius who would gladly have had his earlier days and ways forgotten. "Reject Aeneas," he pleaded, "and accept Pius." With zeal he put himself at the head of a crusade but died before anything could be done.

Pius, the scholar, was succeeded by Paul II who preferred horses to books, yet he fought the Medici oligarchy and frowned on the intellectual pretension of the extreme Humanists. Not so the next Pope, Sixtus IV, who was born the son of a fisherman, but proved a rich patron of the arts, and supervised Michael Angelo's painting in the Sistine Chapel. His successor, Innocent VIII, turned out to be a bad pope whom the Dominican friar, Savonarola, lashed up and down the peninsula for his sins, offences and negligences. Still worse was Alexander VI, the Borgia who lived the life of a temporal lord rather than of a spiritual leader. He was no better nor worse than the rank and file of Italian princes, "most of whom," Pius II had lamented, "are born out of wedlock." A generous patron of the arts, gifted with an uncanny knowledge of men, Alexander was himself a confirmed worldling. "I assure you," cried Savonarola, "that this Alexander is no pope at all, and should not be accounted as such, for besides having attained to the Chair of St. Peter

## *Saint Joan of Arc and the Fifteenth Century*

by the shameful sin of simony, and still daily selling the Church benefices to the highest bidder, besides his other vices which are known to the world. . . ." There can be no doubt that this pontiff and his base family did enormous harm in their day. A storm cloud, ugly and menacing, hung over the Chair of Peter. It could not bring peace, order, justice. It never could so long as Medicis and Borgias held sway. No possibility, then, of spiritual or moral mobilization; no other alternative save a period of anarchy.

### *France Wins Her Place*

Look at the European scene towards the close of the century. As the final curtain fell, darkness gathered over all the hopes of the saints, the dreams of the reformers. Only over the Land of Lilies was there a gleam of light. And that came from the spirit of Joan of Arc who had made the people passionately interested in the security and welfare of their country. After the English had fled in 1436, the French at the point of exhaustion could do no more than husband their depleted energies. Year by year, however, under Charles VII the nation began to recover strength, and before long stood stalwart alongside the new powers, Germany and England. In 1445 Charles created a great army; fifteen companies of six hundred men, nine thousand of whom were cavalry; archers and artillery men and engineers came later. With this formidable force France, though cramped and confined, was able to acquire broad frontier provinces. By the union of Charles VIII and Anne of Brittany the authority of the *fleur-de-lis* became strongly established. Very soon Italy's doors lay wide open, since the Angevin claim to Naples, lost in 1462, had passed to the French. The peninsula was divided, unwarlike, yet passing rich in all the fruits of the Renaissance. So the French standard with Joan of Arc's

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

inspired symbols flew high and wide over the Alps, was wildly welcomed by Milan after her quarrel with Naples, and by Florence fed-up on the Medici tyrants. Pope Alexander, seeing his political plans go to pieces, grew desperate and did not hesitate to call upon the Sultan of Turkey to come to his aid. In September, 1494, Charles VIII invaded the south, reaching Naples early the following year, and later became King of Sicily. But in one of his last acts the wily Borgian Pope formed a league so powerful that the French King was obliged to withdraw.

Yes, Joan of Arc had put the spirit of high courage into her countrymen, and France at the century end had become a great power. But the people of Europe were divided and the Church still in a bad way. Two things had happened to spell the doom of religious unity and discipline. In the first place the authority of the papacy had grown so weak year after year, that the decrees of reform, formulated by the Council of Constance, fell short of fulfillment. At Pavia and at Siena they were not even issued, and Nicholas V's attempt at mid-century to apply them proved quite futile. In the second place, Humanism at its peak strength, had not only undermined the Catholic faith but also impaired European morale. The ideas, habits, all the pagan convictions of the New Learning held the stage. Italy, long decadent under the Humanist Popes, was wreaking her own destruction. Even though she still reigned in the world of culture she had lost her place in the welter of war, a mere prize for the strongest nation that could seize her. Germany was sullen, the old Teuton antagonism towards the Latin increased hourly, while the new German theology widened the breach. England lived in torment and hope, the air full of winged arrows, war and preparation for war absorbing all her attention. Spain, grasping for the new wealth that Christopher Columbus

### *Saint Joan of Arc and the Fifteenth Century*

promised, still ruled the sea, her ships in line with those of Portugal. The canny Swiss stood at swords-points with Austria, while the Hungarians had to bear the brunt of the Turkish invasion. Only in the Lowlands a ray of hope filtered through the black clouds when Thomas à Kempis wrote his "Imitation of Christ," which incidentally gives the best historic insight into the spirit of those dying years. No nation was any longer sure of itself, yet each showed feverish determination to hold on to its power as long as it could. All in all, the fuse was running fast, the mine about to explode, and Europe stood on the verge of the greatest catastrophe which had ever threatened the Catholic Church.



# Saint Ignatius of Loyola

CHAMPION OF THE CHURCH

# SAINT IGNATIUS AND THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

<i>Emperors</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
		ALEXANDER VI, 1492-1503 JULIUS II, 1503-1513 LEO X, 1513-1521
MAXIMILIAN, 1519	Power of France in Italy overthrown	1512
CHARLES V, 1519-1558	Publication of Luther's Thesis	1517
	Election of the Emperor Charles V	1519
	Luther excommunicated	1520
	Ignatius wounded at Pampeluna	1521
	Diet of Worms	1521
	Ignatius at Montsurat and Manresa	1522
	Ignatius in Holy Land	1523
	Ignatius a student at Barcelona	1524
	Charles V's capture of Rome	1527
	Reformation in Hungary	1527
	Ignatius, student at Paris	1528
	Reformation spreads to Switzerland	1528
	Diet and Confession of Augsburg	1530
	Six Companions take vows	1534
	Martyrdom of More and Fisher	1534
	Calvin at Geneva	1536
	Ignatius ordained to priesthood	1537
	Vain attempt to Protestantize Ireland	1537
	Catholic League	1538
	Society of Jesus founded	1540
	Council of Trent	1542
	Death of Luther	1546
	Death of Henry VIII	1547
	Philip Neri founds Oratorians	1548
	Peace of Passau	1552
	Diet of Augsburg	1555
	Death of Ignatius Loyola	1556
	Death of Emperor Charles V	1558
FERDINAND I, 1558-1564	Elizabeth ascends throne of England	1558
MAXIMILIAN II, 1564-1576	Teresa reforms Carmelite Order	1562
	Death of Michael Angelo	1563
	Birth of Shakespeare	1564
	John of the Cross begins reform for men	1568
RUDOLF II, 1576-1612	Pope excommunicates Elizabeth	1570
	Birth of Ben Jonson	1574
	Penal Laws in England	1577
	Jesuits renovate Rome	
	Execution of priests in England	1584
	Art and architecture revived in Rome	1585
	Sailing of Spanish Armada	1588
	Jesuits at work in Italy and Spain	1590
	Sweden accepts Augsburg Confession	1593
	Jesuits at work in Germany, Bohemia, Moravia	1595
	The tide of Protestantism stemmed	1599
		ADRIAN VI, 1522-1523 CLEMENT VII, 1523-1534  PAUL III, 1534-1549  JULIUS III, 1550-1555 MARCELLUS II, 1555 PAUL IV, 1555-1559 PIUS IV, 1559-1565 St. PIUS V, 1566-1572 GREGORY XIII, 1572-1585  SIXTUS V, 1585-1590 URBAN VII, 1590 GREGORY XIV, 1590-1591 INNOCENT IX, 1591-1592 CLEMENT VIII, 1592-1605

## SAINT IGNATIUS AND THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

### *The Brink of Change*

A decade before this century there was born in the beautiful Basque country a child of wondrous destiny, Ignatius of Loyola. You can still see the house, two stories with thick walls, the armorial bearings of the family over the doorway. It was a proud house in proud Spain which had put the Moors in their place in the south. The King, Ferdinand the Catholic, empowered by the alliance of Castile and Aragon, held his head high among the nations. His army and navy ranked foremost in Europe, Naples was his dependency; and he could boast a great overseas empire, discovered by Columbus. Juan Velasquez, grand treasurer of Ferdinand, took Ignatius under his wing, and the eyes of the eager Basque lad were open to the glory that was Spain. The amazing Las Casas, friend of Velasquez, must have caught his boyish fancy. The Basque lad was only twelve when this former lawyer and explorer whose father had accompanied Columbus on his first voyage, was on his way to Hispaniola. There he was ordained, the first priest in the New World, with a career ahead that was long and eventful. No doubt Ignatius in his late teens heard much of this extraordinary priest, "who crossed the ocean no less than twelve times, traversed every known region of America and the islands, made journeys from Spain to Flanders and Germany to see the Emperor, and achieved literary labors that would have been remarkable even in a scholar who had no calling outside the halls of his college." But Ignatius, in love with court life, was not interested in missions — not then. He was full of the spirit of chivalry, noble of heart and strong in his faith, and he

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

wanted to serve his country. After the death of Velasquez, he joined the army of the Viceroy of Navarre, making good as a soldier; he was grit to the core, quick in a quarrel, a boon companion who could gamble with the rest, and a sentimentalist who loved the ladies.

While Ignatius led this rough-and-ready barrack existence, there lived in Germany an extraordinary person fated to be his adversary through life. The two, strange to say, never met face to face, yet their combat was to continue for centuries. Martin Luther, eight years older than Ignatius, was the son of a plain Saxon miner of Eisleben. The peasant lad, used to rough life and coarse ideas, decided to get himself an education at Magdeburg. As a student he paid for his books and teaching by singing from door to door and, after completing his studies at Erfurt, tried a legal career. Two years at law proved enough, so he quit the profession against his father's will, to enter an Augustinian monastery. This step was in fulfilment of a rash vow he had made to St. Ann one day when in terror of a thunder storm. By 1508 he had become a popular preacher at Wittenberg and a professor with a following at the university. Big, genial, generous, he was subject to moods of melancholy and to attacks of religious terror along with queer ideas of holiness which increased as he steeped himself in the Scriptures. The attempt of his brother monks to put the scrupulous man straight as to his soul's salvation failed dismally, and the only consolation Luther could find was in St. Paul's Epistles to the Romans and Galatians. The truth of the Apostle's words, "The just shall live by faith," possessed his mind to the exclusion of every other truth, even that of St. James' Epistle to the effect that "Faith without good works is dead." He found so much comfort in the idea of "faith alone" that he grasped it as the one thing necessary, teaching the half-truth at every

## *Saint Ignatius and the Sixteenth Century*

opportunity. It is not surprising, therefore, that this brooding monk, now become arrogant, ran into arguments with the Dominicans. An unquestionably able orator as well as writer, he inspired fanatical allegiance in his followers, and in 1517 he entered the arena against John Tetzel who preached "indulgences" in the neighborhood of Wittenberg. Quickly the issue was joined in bitter earnest, Luther accusing the Dominican of selling his spiritual wares to pay for the building of St. Peter's in Rome. Pope Leo X, hearing the dark hints of impending change, thought the whole matter a mere squabble of monks. But the Emperor Maximilian, whose pet political plans had been thwarted by the Holy See, said to the Elector Frederick, "Let the Wittenberg monk be taken good care of; we may some day want him." Luther presently denied the value of works of the human will; it does not matter what people do, he held, what matters is what they believe about the passion and death of Christ. And as for "indulgences," why, they are a mere papal invention, sheer money-making nonsense! One debate led to another, and it was not long before the monk, truculent and arrogant, attacked the priesthood, the hierarchy, the Pope himself, whereupon he merited excommunication. When the Bull was issued in June 15, 1520, Luther flung back with all his black temper, calling the papal decree "the execrable bull of Antichrist" and publicly burning it at the gates of Wittenberg in the presence of doctors, students and citizens. The so-called Reformation had at last been launched!

### *In the Wars*

The same year the inflammatory and sensational Luther fought the Church in Germany, Ignatius, a mettlesome knight, served Spain under the banner of the Duke of Najera. At Pampeluna where his soldiers were defending the fortress

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

against the French, he was severely wounded by a cannon ball. His companions-in-arms tried to set the leg but it had to be broken again; he took it like a soldier, clenching and unclenching his fists under the excruciating operation. Back in the Loyola home, the restless sentimental knight asked for books on romance to while away his long convalescence. But there were none to be had so they gave him a Spanish "*Lives of the Saints*," and "*A Life of Christ*." These Ignatius read and pondered, but in other moods he still dreamed of deeds of valor for a fair lady. The day came, however, when the examples of God's holy heroes took root in his soul. "If these saints can do this and that, why can't I?" he asked himself. "What if I were to do the deeds of a St. Dominic or a St. Francis?" That was exactly what Divine Providence had set Ignatius apart to do! And as thoughts of religion prevailed he determined to give up the world and become a Knight of God. The devotion he had for the Mother of Jesus intensified this resolve, and, upon recovery, he visited her shrine in Catalonia. On the night of the Annunciation he kept vigil before the miraculous picture of Our Lady in the Church of Montserrat. Garbed in a rough penitential garment, having given his knightly apparel to a beggar, he hung up his sword and dagger by the altar and pledged himself to God's service. A great path lay ahead for the Spanish soldier of Christ. One day, not two decades away, he would apply his genius for order, unity and discipline; rally his loyal forces against a terrible foe, and furnish the finest example of chivalry in Christendom.

What should interest us at this stage is the startling contrast in the personalities of Ignatius of Loyola and Martin Luther. The Spaniard and the German stood at antipodes, one from another. Their views of life as well as their behavior were utterly opposite. While Loyola grew strong in

## *Saint Ignatius and the Sixteenth Century*

the silent war against self, Luther, the agitator, was ever stirring up a commotion all over Germany. The Spanish knight of God led a most ascetic life, practicing self-discipline, begging his bread, daily attending Mass, and spending hours on his knees in prayer. The Wittenberg professor, a Teuton to the marrow of his bones, raised his voice in the market-place, becoming bolder, more defiant; in a fury of anger he attacked the Mass, sacerdotal ordination, pilgrimages, fastings, even monasticism. Great illumination from on high was given the humble Ignatius whom God treated "exactly as a schoolmaster treats a child whom he is teaching." But the proud Luther became a torn troubled creature, full of hate for authority, the victim of constant fits of remorse. A study of their doings at this time will reveal what manner of men they were: "From their fruits you shall know them." Ignatius growing more expert in holiness and in the discernment of spirits, gave people at Manresa, "spiritual exercises" in which they could learn more than the sages had to convey. In a spirit of humility and with a contrite heart he faced every inner trial until peace came to him at last. Luther, contrariwise, in bitter conflict stirred up a fury of opposition to the Church. His Humanist friends, ever critical of Rome, took to his Bible exegesis, applauded his savage tirades. "He has sinned," said the cynical Erasmus to Frederick, "in two points. He has hit the pope's crown and the bellies of the monks." Enough surely to show not only their different habits of mind, but also the divers paths these two men had taken, paths that would become the more marked as time marched on.

### *The Two Standards*

Germany now stood between two choices as the tide rose against Rome. Francis, the Elector, grew more despotic

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

than ever, taxing his impoverished peasants beyond all reason. Princes quarrelled among themselves and with the bishops, while the old Emperor vainly sought to put an end to private feuds. Luther, more reckless than ever, had become a national figure, what with his bold revolutionary doctrines or reform, his hatred of Rome, his espousal of the German cause; an early *Deutschland über alles*. Emperor Charles V, greatly disturbed, called a diet at Worms in 1521 before which the Wittenberg monk was summoned to answer for himself. All along the way the peasants gathered to greet him with enthusiasm; and when a councillor warned him of the fate of Huss, the reformer replied, "I will go on, though as many devils were aiming at me as there are tiles on the roof." Once in the diet hall before Emperor and nobles, he appeared a bit dazed, but became steadier as he was guided by counsel. Asked to retract the contents of his fiery books, he asked for time to reply; on the following day he declared he could not retract anything he had written until it was proved contrary to Scriptures or right reason. There were those at the diet who urged the Emperor to arrest the rebel on the spot, but the German princes angrily demurred, threatening vengeance if their idol were harmed. On April 28, 1521, on his way back to Wittenberg, Luther was whisked away by the Elector's soldiers and carried off to a place out of harm's way. Safe at the castle of Wartburg he dined well, carried a sword, and went hunting deer; yet he managed to keep busy translating the New Testament into the German language. But scarce had the diet dispersed when an edict, issued at Rome, placed the reformer under the ban, and he woke up in Wartburg to find himself an outlaw in the eyes of the Church and the Empire.

About this time Ignatius, completely won over to God's cause, sought for the best means to service. A man of action,

## *Saint Ignatius and the Sixteenth Century*

he needs must go into the world and prepare himself for what Heaven wanted him to do. Embarking at Barcelona, he crossed the Great Sea to Gatea, reaching Rome in 1523. The pilgrim had ample time "to observe in his soul now this, now that, and found it profitable; then, thought he, this might also be useful to others." Thus the Book of Exercises, begun in Manresa, must have grown bit by bit, year after year. After receiving the blessing of Pope Adrian VI, the poorly clad Spaniard begged his way to Venice whence he sailed for the land where Jesus lived. Was it in the Holy Land those wonderful compositions of place etched themselves in his glowing heart, and the meditation on the Two Standards, became such an intense spiritual reality? In Jerusalem his soul overflowed with heavenly consolations and he was eager to become a missionary to the Mohammedans. It was not to be, for the Franciscan Provincial appeared on the scene, quoted the papal decrees, and ordered Ignatius under the pain of censure to go back to Spain. There was nothing to do but obey. The pilgrim bowed to the will of God, picked up scrip and staff, and returned the long heart-breaking way to Barcelona. This single episode affords a glimpse into the soul of a companion of God for whom obedience to the Church was paramount; of whom, too, History would write large that "the obedient man speaks of Victory!" What diametrically opposite ways of life Ignatius and Luther exhibit at this stage of their careers! One the humble, obedient pilgrim, seeking more light on the will of God; the other a proud, resentful upstart, causing nothing but mischief in Christendom.

### *The Two Standards*

All signs indicated the rapid spread of religious rebellion in Germany, as Carlstadt, taking a page from Luther, assailed

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the rites of the Church, and other zealots for reform prophesied a great social upheaval. Luther, stubborn as ever, left his asylum for Wittenberg where he continued to preach, teach and write against the Church. Peace seemed as far away as order, and the cry continued for national unity and drastic reform. In 1524 the Pope's legate seeking to calm the storm at the Diet of Nuremberg had given assurance that the needful changes would be enforced, but the German knights had resolved on warlike measures to settle their own troubles. It looked as if Germany, so vocal for reform across the Alps, could not even make peace within its own borders. The War of the Knights was quickly followed by the Revolt of the Peasants which broke out in 1524 and spread rapidly over the land. These peasants misled by Luther's doctrines of Christian liberty became infected with the rebel itch and soon ran amok, resorting to rapine and plunder. Then it was they found Luther, their fancied abettor, a cruel enemy who urged the princes to cut them down like dogs. The nobles, emboldened by the ex-monk's words, did just that, slaying the wild humans, and punishing their leaders. Before the revolt came to an end, the Elector Frederick died; his brother, John the Steadfast, succeeded, and became a stout defender of Luther. Nothing shows more clearly how low Luther had fallen than the marriage he now entered into with Catherine van Born, a former Cistercian nun! By this step the storm-torn reformer dismayed some of his best friends, but here again it is evident he had become a law unto himself. The unhappy, tortured escapist sought a home where, away from intense excitement and feverish existence, he could enjoy music and song and the innocent pranks of children. His wife became "Mistress Kate," "Doctress Luther" in the letters he sent her amidst crowded days of writing, preaching, debating with foes on

## *Saint Ignatius and the Sixteenth Century*

every side. And as for his home life, the ill-tempered, vulgar drift of his "Table Talk" reveals nothing if not the soul of a man fallen from grace. It would not be long before he would advise Henry VIII to marry a second wife without repudiating the first; and so truckle to the royalty as to admit shamelessly they had the right to practice polygamy.

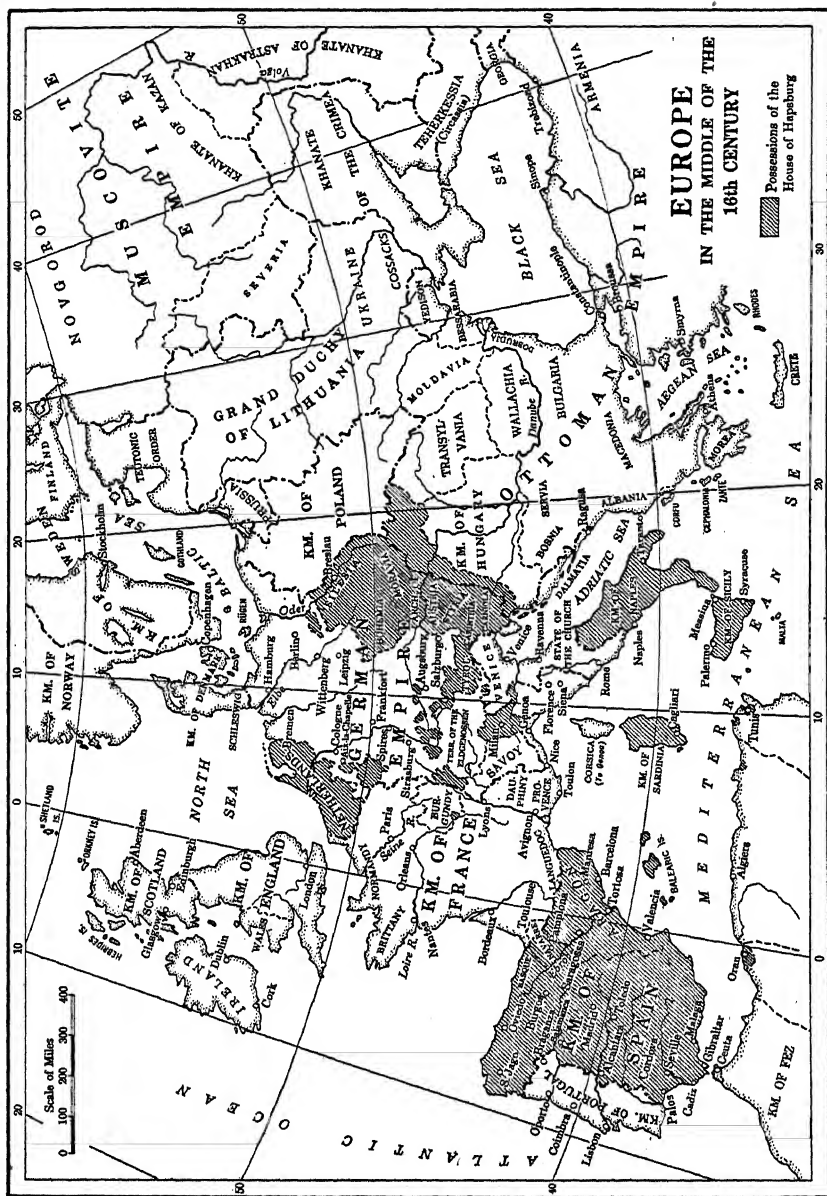
Look at Ignatius now, if you would clearly realize the difference, the complete contrariety, between the two outstanding sixteenth-century leaders. Upon his return from the Holy Land the pilgrim thought to enter a religious house, but he felt the need of a well-grounded education. You see him then at the age of thirty studying Latin in a boys' school at Barcelona, side by side with mere youngsters. For seven years he would labor incessantly to improve his mind, little dreaming of the *via mirabilis* in which God was leading him. Out of school hours this marvel of humility conducted the "Spiritual Exercises," visited the poor and sick, gave comfort to thousands of strayed souls; it was the same in Alcala and Salamanca where he attended the universities. One is not surprised that in all three places a little company formed about him, and became known to the poor by their coarse brown clothing and their devotion to works of charity. Yet their leader, regarded as a fanatic by the authorities, had to spend forty-two days in an Alcala, twenty-two in a Salamanca prison. In 1528 Ignatius journeyed to Paris and entered the Sorbonne, the center of European learning, where he found the inquisitors still on his trail. Instead of jailing him, however, they gave him a clean bill of orthodoxy; they even asked for a copy of the Book of the Exercises. He was at this time so poor that during vacation days he had to visit Antwerp, Bruges, even London collecting alms to defray the expenses of his courses in philosophy and theology. His earlier disciples in Spain disappeared from the scene, but in

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the Sorbonne a little company formed about the saint, and swore they would never leave him. They were, all nine of them, choice souls joined together for the love and service of Christ, and pledged to follow their Spanish leader to the ends of the earth. Given that spirit, the Society of Jesus began to take shape.

### *Loss and Gain*

Luther's followers, meanwhile, spread the seeds of revolt, and the Reformation soon made its way into Switzerland, reaching Denmark by 1526. So violently were the heretics opposed to the old Church that all attempts at conciliation failed. At the Diet of Spires, in 1526, the States of the Empire agreed to manage their own religious problems as best they could. But the Emperor came to the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, with the determination to restore unity, only to find the Protestants determined to have their own way. Any plan to unite against a common foe, and every attempt to draw up terms of peace met with Luther's opposition; the Treaty of Schmalkalden (1531) did draw eight princes and eleven cities together to oppose the Turk, but only on condition that they should be given freedom to preach Lutheranism everywhere. This *quid pro quo* is a clear index to the temper of reformers intoxicated by the success of their movement which, spreading like a flood, threatened to engulf the Empire. Their archleader, the Earth Shaker, found himself in a mess with the other leaders many of whom were alienated by the bitterness of his invective. The Anabaptists resorted to wilder and wilder extremes; the Saxons under Carlstadt insisted on their independent propaganda; Zwingli in Switzerland held opinions widely different. Still worse, the sharp Calvin was day by day getting a step ahead of him. Victim of an uncontrollable temper, Luther continued



## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

hot and hostile, disputing with reformers on every side till the fight appeared rather with enemies within the gates than with far-off Rome. By this time Germany was like a great bomber whose pilot had lost both his grip and his sense of direction. When in 1542 the Council of Trent was summoned, the ex-monk Luther, angry as usual, refused to attend; as time wore on the rampaging creature became cagey and non-committal, seemingly satisfied with his theory of "faith alone." "Abraham," he declared, "had faith; therefore Abraham was a good Christian." To such shallows had his new theology led the vaunted reformer of Christendom. Yet he continued to rant in more gross language than ever, stigmatizing the papacy as one of the devices of the devil. His last days proved miserably unhappy; old temptations assailed his soul and bitter disappointment at the state of affairs at home and abroad. In 1546 he died after a stroke of apoplexy, leaving behind a group of younger zealots who tried to copy the erratic original, as they continued to sow the seeds of hate and discord. No one can doubt that the Church had already suffered a deep wound — faith, unity, culture, social life shared that wound and it would take centuries to recover from its effects.

Let us go back now a few years for a brief view of the Roman scene. When Pope Adrian VI (1522-1523) succeeded Leo X at the helm, Ignatius was preaching at Manresa and Luther enjoyed sanctuary in Wartburg. A man of deep learning and devout life, the new Pope set about to reform the court, but was unable to temper the German attitude towards Rome. Providentially the Church was strengthened by the rise of new congregations: the Theatines, the Capuchins, the Barnabites, and the Oratorians. It was a member of the first-named society, Carafa, who discovered Ignatius and his little company in Venice. They had been in Rome

## *Saint Ignatius and the Sixteenth Century*

and the Pope, after listening to them debate with the Roman doctors, gave them aid for the journey to Jerusalem. As they waited for a ship at Venice, Carafa, aware of the urgent and all-important task ahead, advised a change of plan. Let them return to Rome where their holy zeal could be better employed in quelling Protestantism than in converting the heathen. Back in Rome, with the Name of Jesus on their banner, the Pope willingly accepted their proffered services: Ignatius to preach the Spiritual Exercises, Faber and Laynez to lecture on theology. By May 10, 1538, when Luther and his so-called reformers were in the thick of strife, ten members of the "Society of Jesus" assembled together in Rome; they pledged themselves to meet, face, and repulse the forces of heresy. Never a day but they preached and gave instruction throughout the city, much to the surprise of the people unused to seeing men without monastic dress in the pulpits. "We thought," they said, "that no one but monks had a right to preach." In a short time the "plain clothes" priests gained the confidence of the people, gave promise of doing great things for the Church. Armed and fully equipped in every way, they became tract-writers, confessors, preachers, missionaries — a veritable militia of the Holy See whose aim was the restoration of authority. Early in their career they ran into a near-tragedy when an Augustinian friar appeared in Rome, sowing the seeds of Lutheranism. The new order saw through him, exposed his theories, and incurred the wrath of his friends. One can understand the feelings of the brave little group on finding themselves victims of calumny. An attempt was made to expel them from Rome; but Ignatius insisted on seeing the thing through. He obtained from Pope Paul III permission to go on until the infant Society was cleared of every taint of suspicion. "After we had been cleared," said Peter Faber, "we placed ourselves unreservedly

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

at the disposal of Paul III." Things began to look up for the society which now went zealously to work in Italy, Spain and Portugal. The education of youth was their forte, and very soon they took over the universities of Vienna, Cologne, Ingolstadt, and Prague. From such centers they turned the tide against Protestantism in the gravely threatened Catholic states.

### *Media of Reform*

The shadows of the Reformation were closing in on Italy, the shock of events made itself felt in Rome. Yet, sad to relate, Pope Clement (1523-1534) was one who "did not renounce his good intention of reforming society, but duly postponed it." His successor, Paul III (1534-1549), at once set about his proper papal business, calling together a group of able men whose task was to look into things that wanted mending. They recommended certain concessions in discipline, and a mutual understanding as to doctrine. Able as they were, none the less their plans fell through, when a "No Surrender" group refused to subscribe to the reform proposals. In 1538 a Catholic League was formed under the advice of the Archduke of Austria. The Catholic bishops and princes agreed to stand by one another in the event of common danger and exclude the Wittenberg heresy from their dominions. Another measure was adopted at Rome, in 1542, when the Holy Office was instituted for the Universal Church. The Popes now controlled the Inquisition, which had to do with opinions that savored of heresy which it sought to suppress. A branch at Venice conducted over fifteen hundred trials in this century alone, but executions were frequent only in Rome. No doubt the procedure was the cruellest, and many escaped official trial only to be waylaid and killed on the streets. The brutal system went on

## *Saint Ignatius and the Sixteenth Century*

for all of a century, giving rise to crimes that stained the history of the Counter-Reformation. And yet in those days some of the Church's greatest saints lighted the darkened spiritual skies, while John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila, enriched the Church with the principles of true mysticism, and Shakespeare and Michael Angelo bequeathed their treasures to the world at large.

Plainly neither political initiative nor the Inquisition achieved anything like the results which followed on the Council of Trent. It was this great assemblage (1545-1563) that provided the vigor and inspiration to meet the quarrel that still rent Christendom. Opened in 1545, it passed various decrees against the Protestants, while favoring tradition, insisting on the authoritative interpretation of the scriptures and approving the Vulgate as the best Latin text of the Bible. At this time Pope Paul III (1534-1549) was having trouble with Henry VIII, yet he could have given the Council more time than he accorded his ambitious relatives. In 1547 the Council adjourned to Bologna, much to the chagrin of the Emperor Charles V who did not care to see it at work within the Papal States. By 1551 it was back in Trent where it tried without success to reach some understanding with the Protestants. One of the heretical princes, Maurice of Saxony, marched on the Tyrol to capture the bishops and cardinals assembled, but the Council broke up in 1552 after passing decrees on the sacraments. It met again in 1562 under Pius IV and pronounced definitely on three sacraments widely attacked by the reformers, viz., the Mass, Holy Orders and Matrimony. In the matter of indulgences it was ruled that none but the bishops could grant or dispense; and the medieval pardoner with his scrip of documents from Rome was ousted once and for all. The Council ended in 1563, whereupon Pius V (1559-1565) who concluded the sessions, began

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

to carry out the Trent reforms. He issued his famous creed, published a corrected index of prohibited books and at the same time saw to it that the protégés of his predecessor, Paul IV, were dismissed from the Roman posts of dignity, civil and ecclesiastical.

### *The English Martyrs*

The Reformation entered England tucked away in the scrrips of the Humanists. It grew under cover in Oxford and Cambridge before the wave of revolt reached the island shores. There were, to be sure, brilliant scholars like More and Colet and Fisher who were devout Catholics, but others like Tyndale and Frith had become tainted with old Lollard doctrines. "If God spares my life," said Tyndale to a divine, "I will cause a boy that driveth the plow shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost." The same boaster later dwelt at Antwerp in a nest of reformers, together with young English students, bent upon sowing Luther's teachings in their native country. This they soon succeeded in doing and they were aided therein by none other than the King, Henry VIII, who earlier had been one of the stoutest defenders of the old faith. Henry had married Catherine of Aragon, by whom he had several children, but only one, Mary Tudor, lived. Madly in love with Ann Boleyn, he decided to put away his lawful wife, and when he could not get his divorce, he employed unconscionable methods to cripple the authority of the Pope and the clergy in England. A solid body of good citizens demurred at the prospect of a divorce; against them stood a strong group of English nobles, friends of Ann Boleyn, who resented the power of Cardinal Wolsey, son of a butcher of Ipswich. Alas, this prelate was an unscrupulous schemer, who forgot to serve God in his service to his King. A terrified Parliament forbade the introduction of papal bulls into

## *Saint Ignatius and the Sixteenth Century*

England and authorized Henry to withdraw all benefices from the Pope. Thus began a period of bitter strife between Church and State during which the soil of England was saturated with the blood of martyrs.

Two great saints, Sir Thomas More and Bishop Fisher, canonized in our own day, boldly stood out against Henry VIII. They realized with what little wisdom the world was being governed and sensed the danger of the temporal power ruling over the spiritual. It mattered little to the King that More was "the most modern and original mind of his time," and Fisher, the holy Bishop of Rochester, the Chancellor of Cambridge University. They must be done away with along with the fearless Carthusians who opposed the state of affairs in the kingdom. Thus the Reformation was to make its gory way into Henry's domains. It was not the English people, who chose to stand side by side with Luther and all his works. It was their incestuous King, and his courtiers, greedy for power and pelf, who dragooned them out of their old religion. Three Carthusians were put to death with barbarous cruelty, on the charge of treason; and it was thought this summary act would frighten the people. Then they arrested John Fisher and imprisoned him in the Tower of London. The able Chancellor of Cambridge, who stood alone among the English bishops, favored the royal supremacy, but only in so far "as the divine law permits." The Pope had announced his name for cardinal, but Henry said, "I'll send his head to Rome for the cap." An agent of the King called on him for submission but he stoutly refused, and it was a calm, even willing bishop they led to the gallows. Next came Sir Thomas More, Henry's loyal Chancellor. No more complete Englishman existed in those days than the great Catholic scholar and lawyer but he would have no truck with the King's shameless behavior. He too went to

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

his death with a quip on his lips and a protest of true loyalty to God and his King. Now that Henry had rejected the Pope and gotten rid of the greatest men in the realm, he proceeded to expel and suppress the religious orders. The gray friars, sons of St. Francis, and the black friars, sons of St. Dominic, were ordered to leave the country. All the monasteries were raided and the loot went into the royal coffers. For all who would not submit, the punishment was rack and rope, stake and gibbet. Henry's blind hatred did not end there; he shocked Europe by burning the relics of St. Thomas of Canterbury; he caused statues, shrines and holy objects of veneration to be destroyed; with the fury of a madman he created havoc throughout all his domains.

#### *Old Europe's Demise*

Look at the picture in the second half of the century. The old world, as we saw her in the past, was no more. The Reformation, in origin a German movement, had long since become European, and the nation had become a religious unit. Gone was the Holy Roman Empire which had rested four square on Pope and Emperor, Catholic states and peoples. Half of Europe now repudiated the Vicar of Christ; only Spain, Ireland, Italy, and South Germany remained loyal. For the rest, England, Scotland, Denmark, Prussia, Saxony, Hesse, the Palatinate and much of Switzerland embraced Protestantism; there were hundreds of thousands in Bavaria who left the Church, while Poland and Hungary suffered from the heretic's incursions. The picture was no longer the Catholic Church, with its one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism; it was "the Churches" who set their faces against Rome. As to the Emperor whose *raison d'être* was to defend and uphold the Church, there was little room for him amid such religious division. Only in Spain where Church and State

## *Saint Ignatius and the Sixteenth Century*

stood as one, did Philip II exercise universal rule. In England, Mary Tudor tried to make the land Catholic; Elizabeth succeeded in returning it to Protestantism. The towns of Switzerland followed Zwingli, the countryside remained Catholic, but the government of the Churches lay in the hands of the civil authorities. A large part of France and most of Scotland succumbed to Calvin "the most daring religious despot Europe had seen since the dawn of Christianity." This sharp-sighted organizer did not try to start a new Church, but to create a new world. Indeed, it did look as if "in a mighty dust of war and revolt, Christendom itself was vanishing." And this tragedy was, fundamentally, blameable upon the so-called reformers.

Such was the state of affairs all over Europe — raw, bloody, violent, in this terrible age of persecution. The total number of victims in the wars of religion exceeded the numbers of martyrs in the third and fourth centuries. "Of the common run of Christians think this," said Erasmus; "that none were ever more corrupt, even among the pagans in their notions of morals." A pathetic picture, surely, of how low the old Empire had fallen; how little Luther really accomplished for the cause of Christianity. The so-called Reformation, admittedly, had done two gigantic evils; it had secularized life, and played into the hands of the greedy State. So far had the love of change and the suspicion of authority brought the would-be religious reformers that their "churches" had become national establishments subject to the civil government. From now on the State would grow daily more powerful and more tyrannical as Machiavelli's dark image became an actual reality. Even now the states in their pride of power brought about just as much strife and oppression as did the old religious conflict. The right of man and natural law had no place in the new political scheme of things.

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

Its all-embracing aim would presently be, "Everything within the State, nothing against the State, nothing outside the State." And as for the Catholic Church, why she must be made submit to the claims of the civil power — only she could not and would not. No! She would resist to the teeth such stolen authority, resist it all the more when it presently assumed the hideous shape of "the Divine Right of Kings."

# Saint John Baptist De La Salle

FATHER OF MODERN PEDAGOGY

# SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE AND THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

<i>Kings of France</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
HENRY IV, -1612	Decay of European society 1601	CLEMENT VIII, 1592-1605
	Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva 1602	
	Reformed Carmelites enter France 1603	
	Birth of Jacques Olier in Paris 1608	LEO XI, 1605 PAUL V, 1605-1621
LOUIS XIII, 1612-1643	Visitation Nuns founded by St. Francis de Sales 1610	
	Catholic Renaissance in France 1612	
	Reform of Benedictines, "Les Feuillants" 1618	
	Thirty Years War begins in Bohemia 1622	GREGORY XV, 1621-1623 URBAN VIII, 1623-1644
LOUIS XIV, 1643-1715	Richelieu rules France 1622	
	Charles I on English throne 1625	
	Richelieu subdues the nobles 1626	
	Death of Francis Bacon 1626	
	Birth of Bossuet 1627	
	Huguenots suppressed by Richelieu 1628	
	Jansenism grows in France 1638	
	Ursulines labor in Quebec 1639	
	Pope condemns Jansenius 1641	
	Jacques Olier curé of San Sulpice 1642	
	Death of Richelieu 1642	
	Daughters of Providence founded 1648	INNOCENT X, 1644-1655
	Thirty Years War ends 1648	
	Uprising of the Nobles 1650	
	Des Cartes doctrines widespread 1650	
	Sisters of St. Joseph founded at Le Puy 1650	
	Birth of John Baptist de la Salle 1651	
	Birth of Fenelon 1651	
	Louis XIV crowned at Rheims 1655	ALEXANDER VII, 1655-1667
	Death of Cardinal Mazarin 1661	
	The "Glorious Years" (1661-1678) 1661	
	De la Salle receives tonsure 1662	
	De la Salle a Canon at Rheims 1667	CLEMENT IX, 1667-1669 CLEMENT X, 1670-1676
	De la Salle enters San Sulpice 1670	
	Louis XIV a virtual dictator 1673	
	"Quietism" in Spain and Italy 1675	
	De la Salle ordained to priesthood 1678	INNOCENT XI, 1676-1689
	Habeas Corpus Law in England 1679	
	De la Salle sows seeds of great system 1679	
	De la Salle founds boys institute 1681	
	Rise of Gallicanism 1682	
	De la Salle resigns his Canonry 1683	
	Rule of Christian Brothers 1684	
	Sisters of the Presentation 1684	
	Edict of Nantes evoked 1685	
	The Toleration Act 1689	ALEXANDER VIII, 1689-1691 INNOCENT XII, 1691-1700
	De la Salle's first Novitiate at Vaugirard 1691	
	Birth of Voltaire, Herald of Modern Spirit 1694	
	Lazarists founded by St. Vincent 1697	
	De la Salle's first Sunday School in Paris 1698	
	The "General Overturn" in sight 1699	

## SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE AND THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

### *Road to Recovery*

Whatever may be said of these days, it is certain that a new age had begun. When Luther and his colleagues split Christendom they paved the way for a pagan state. The Church, then, faced by corrupt prevailing evils needs must meet the Reformation by reform. Weak and impoverished herself, she knew that nothing had been so disastrous as the spiritual inertia of the previous century. The time had come to rouse herself and combat a system that was rapidly oppressing her children, enslaving their sacramental life. Civil authorities imposed their tyrannies by bribery, suppression, confiscation; they were attempting in their skinned-down way to take over the Church's social work. A great task in the European world lay before her — to win souls back to God. By Divine Providence she had miraculously survived the worst, and now she must begin courageously to build for the better. By the power of Christ Who never deserts His Spouse, she set out to retrieve her heavy losses. Ups and downs, fears and alarms did not deter her as she labored to secure social justice within the nations. Let there be protests, opposition, persecution; let infidel crews laugh God's world to scorn. The Church was now on the offensive, ready in counter-attack to bleed her heart out for the cause of Christ. And though she could still count the inept, the feeble, the incompetent, yet a glory of sanctity showed in her ranks, and the splendors of Catholic education, eloquence and science broke out upon the dismal scene. At the very time Europe seemed to have gone cold, up blazed the fire of

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men and women, sons and daughters of the Church. This is the greatest fact of the seventeenth century.

One stands breathless in admiration of those brave men and women whose lives speak out:

Go Master,  
and we will follow Thee  
to the last gasp,  
in faith and loyalty.

Gladly they fared forth to preach and teach, they feared nothing on earth, they were ready if need be to die. Old orders, long inactive, came alive, while new religious communities appeared on the scene. Lest we miss the whole century-picture let us try to count them on our fingers. The Jesuits braved every stronghold of Protestantism, preaching with zeal, teaching with matchless power. The Reformed Carmelites of Spain labored in France as early as 1603, and the Oratorians, founded in 1611, spread to Florence, Venice and Verona. The Sulpicians, under the intrepid Jacques Olier, trained men for the priesthood in a chaotic world; their headquarters, San Sulpice, was to prove a tower of strength in dreadful days to come. Similarly the reforms of St. Maur and La Trappe strengthened the spiritual bastion of France; and the Capuchins, humble and full of charity, labored in Switzerland and the Tyrol. Near the end of the century sons of St. Vincent de Paul, seeking the peace of God instead of the sword, spent themselves among the underprivileged, while the congregation of St. Jean Eudes furnished men of prayer for a failing age. A veritable host of valiant religious women also set to work purifying the befouled soil of Europe. All they asked was to be allowed to serve the poor, the sick, the ignorant — and they sought no earthly

## *Saint John Baptist De La Salle and the Seventeenth Century*

reward. The long-established Ursulines could even be found in far-off America; theirs was the first of the modern teaching orders of women. The Visitation Order, born of the zeal of that perfect bishop, St. Francis de Sales, not only nursed the sick, but restored the fruits of faith. And the Daughters of Charity wrought valiantly in every field under the leadership of Louise de Merillac. Add to these the Presentation Sisters, the Sisters of St. Joseph, the Sisters of Mercy of St. Charles Borromeo, the Religious of the Perpetual Adoration. Why, even the scoffer Voltaire was constrained to confess, "Perhaps there is on earth nothing so grand as the sacrifice of beauty, youth, and position, made by the more delicate sex, in order to succor the mass of sufferers in our hospitals, the very sight of whom is so humiliating to our pride, and so repugnant to our delicacy."

### *Vision of Service*

Watching the flow of the seventeenth century, it is our plan to concentrate on the life and work of St. John Baptist de la Salle. A Christian hero who sacrificed his all to teach the poor, a priest of the Most High who devoted his talents to the perfection of a great institute, this faithful servant of God's Kingdom drew forth from his treasury old things and new, richly meriting the title, "Father of Modern Pedagogy." John Baptist was born in 1651, the son of Louis de la Salle, a councillor of Rheims, and Nicole Moet, daughter of another councillor in the same court. They were a family of ancient lineage, noble, solid and widely respected; hence the saint's early life with six brothers and sisters was spent amidst the most sheltered, even austere, surroundings of a magistrate's home. He learned how to serve Mass, became an altar boy, and at all times gave good example, his disposition being so sweet and affable that everybody loved him. Easy to see

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

how the growing lad reflected the splendid virtues and superior qualities of his parents: like his father, John had a noble sense of justice, like his mother, the boy's piety was solid and deep. At nine, he entered the university where by dint of industry and fine intelligence he made rapid strides, nor was it long before the able student felt it his vocation to study for the priesthood. He was only eleven when he received tonsure; at sixteen they made him a Canon of Rheims, a member of an illustrious body that took rank after the Archbishop. "My little cousin," said the old Vicar Général, "bear in mind that a Canon should be like a Cistercian Monk, passing his life in solitude and prayer." Manifestly that is just what the young man did, as he continued his courses, became Master of Arts, and then went on to prepare for the priesthood.

San Sulpice, the seminary to which John now directed his steps, lay in the heart of Paris. On the register of admission you can still read — "Oct. 18, 1670. John Baptist de la Salle, acolyte and Canon of Rheims." The royal city could boast no greater powerhouse of sanctity than this Sulpician seminary, no more orderly locality than the parish which its founder, Jacques Olier, had created from the vilest slums. In 1642 when he became pastor, the Faubourg de Saint-Germain reeked with sorcerers, atheists and libertines. Every alley was overrun by incorrigible gamins, every street had its thieves and gutter-snipes. Books on black magic were brazenly peddled at the church doors; practices more vile than the sewers of Paris abounded. For example, the police raided a seemingly respectable house where they found an altar dedicated to Satan; there were black candles and a missal, and an inscription, "Thanks to thee, Lucifer, thanks to thee Beelzebub; thanks to thee Azrael." The holy Olier had changed all this, making the abode of Satan a place of

## *Saint John Baptist De La Salle and the Seventeenth Century*

law, order and peace. He brought the poor erring lambs back into the fold; even the hearts of the royalty were touched by this Apostolic priest. Echoes of Olier's work must have reached the ears of young de la Salle when he entered San Sulpice, since many of the professors there remembered their old superior and imitated his stalwart virtues. One of them was John's director, Father Bauyn, a priest firm of soul, upright of mind, and distinguished for his simple piety and profound humility. A beautiful friendship sprang up between these kindred spirits which neither time nor events could weaken. No doubt the splendid example of the older man was of incalculable spiritual value to the newcomer. "Our young seminarist," says a contemporary, "was a faithful observer of the rule, and punctual at all the exercises of the community. His conversation was always gentle and decorous. He never seemed to me to have annoyed anyone or merited any reproach." Thus was de la Salle rated by the students at San Sulpice, many of whom attained high dignities in the Church of France. It was the will of Heaven, however, to reserve for the youth from Rheims the career of a great Christian educator.

### *In God's Plan*

During those all too brief seminary days, John Baptist met the first great crisis of his life. A year and a half after his entrance, word reached him of his mother's death; Louis de la Salle very shortly followed her. Such a loss, at such a time, seemed almost unbearable but the young student, strong in spirit, stood up under the blow. His brothers and sisters looked to him to be both father and mother, so he dutifully left San Sulpice and returned home to Rheims. Cut short in his studies, he was not disheartened; in spite of an aching heart and crushing loneliness, he went forward

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

utterly resigned to God's will. Nothing was more important, however, or more difficult than to stick to his ideals during the six years he cared for his younger charges. The blue-prints the Divine Architect had drawn for John Baptist were indeed unknown to him, and all he could do was to build according to the divine plan as it unfolded. Day after day he set apart hours to study at the University of Rheims; week in and week out he supervised the education of his brothers and sisters. He was twenty-one when he received the order of subdeacon; six years later in 1678 he became a priest forever. All this time John led a quiet inner life, and wrought many good deeds among which must be counted his interest in schools and orphanages. A good and faithful workman, he labored in silence and hope, building to the best of his ability. Nor did it ever occur to him that very soon he would be taking a magnificent initiative, and entering a new field of education.

The student days of John Baptist were coeval with the "Glorious Years" (1661-1678) of France. Louis XIV, mighty in war, expert in the social graces, became an absolute ruler who really dominated Europe. No parliamentary rights would be tolerated by this Grand Monarch, the munificent patron of the arts and sciences, mold of new forms of prose, poetry, architecture. Great men could be found in his domains, but they were regarded as mere subjects. Was not Louis the King Sun who was supposed to enlighten the earth, who held powerful churchmen in the palm of his hand, and exercised what was virtually a religious dictatorship? Yes, of course. In fact, France was a miniature imperial Rome, under a modern Caesar, fed with flattery and drunk with power. Yet what price glory when millions in and out of Paris knew only hunger and infirmity, misery and squalor? All this. King's uncurbed authority, his criminal neglect of

## *Saint John Baptist De La Salle and the Seventeenth Century*

the needy would prove to be the dynamite which could one day explode in revolution. Did John Baptist de la Salle foresee this in his hidden hours of prayer? Very likely he did, and most clearly. And God was to raise him up as a force to offset the sin and selfishness of Louis XIV and his day. It so happened that an old friend, Canon Roland, had interested the young priest in an orphanage for girls. John had proved an enormous help not only in solving knotty problems of management, but also by his valuable scholastic advice. Then the canon suddenly died, leaving to his co-worker the responsibility for the whole project; and because de la Salle was so loyal to God and man he cheerfully shouldered the burden. That reveals his high code of honor; his deep-grown habit of charity which seeks not her own. Even then the successful administrator did not realize that actually he had entered upon a life work; not long after a school for little boys opened in Rouen, and again John was instrumental in starting the project. By little and little he was laying the foundations of an institute, destined to change the face of the whole educational world.

### *The Little Flock*

No biographer has ever pointed out more clearly the mysterious way of special Providence in de la Salle's career than the saint himself. "If ever I thought," he wrote in later years, "that the care which out of pure charity I was taking of schoolmasters would have brought me to feel it was a duty to live with them, I should have given it up at once. In fact it was a great trouble to me when I first took them into my house, and the dislike of it lasted for two years. It was apparently for this reason, that God, Who orders all things with wisdom and gentleness, and Who does not force the inclinations of men, when He willed to employ me en-

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

tirely in the care of schools, wrought imperceptibly and during a long space of time, so that one engagement led to another in an unforeseen way." To be "employed entirely in the care of Christian schools" was beyond any doubt the young priest's vocation. And seldom did a greater need exist for just such schools than in his day when the Church's efforts, social and educational, were so wantonly thwarted. Thousands of poor neglected children, hungry for Christlike love, thirsting for truth, swarmed all over France. They were gripped by want and fear, accustomed only to a daily diet of cruelty and abuse. There were those still worse off, potential criminals knowing only lawlessness, sowing the dragon's teeth that would later tear and rend society. And no greater menace existed than those cynical free-thinkers in high places who held "there should be in the State ignorant tatterdemalions; when the populace begins to reason, all is lost." Now it was to all youth, including these "ignorant tatterdemalions," driven underground, that John Baptist consecrated his life work. Their education, he perceived, would be costly, costly beyond price, for it would demand heroic courage to cope with silent forces waging the devil's own war.

John Baptist had confidence — the confidence born of faith, hope and charity. His family, however, bitterly resented the idea of a Canon of Rheims turned common pedagogue, saddled with the care of a crowd of wild urchins, when he might have rapid advancement in the Church. That did not either discourage nor deter the schoolman, for he knew that God wanted the task done and would never fail in providing the means. The Teacher of teachers had whispered in no uncertain voice: "Go out into the highways and byways, and invite them to come to My Supper." With such a call echoing in his soul how could de la Salle let little things like dignity, honors, academic position stand in the way of God's

## *Saint John Baptist De La Salle and the Seventeenth Century*

work? Time was running short, and the powers of evil were out to destroy young lives. The greatest need of the time, he saw, was to provide efficient teachers; persons of virtue and ability. All the rules the Church drew up could not go far unless there were religious men and women, versed in the art and science of education. So he gathered about him a small band of men in whom he discerned a religious vocation, and in 1682 the little community moved into a house of their own. At once, then, they began their work and so great was the fame of these devoted schoolmasters as to increase the demand for them all over the neighborhood. But there were foes, too, who objected to the children being taught to read and write, insisting that only those should learn whose living depended on reading and writing. The Christian teachers were dubbed "*Freres Ignorantins*"; they were hooted at in the streets; everything possible was done to make it hard for them. All that only made John Baptist more determined to carry on for the sake of the rising generation. In 1683 he resigned his office as Canon of Rheims, sold his goods, and spent the money for the relief of the poor. He was stripped of such burdens now and like a true athlete of Christ, he was ready to take the road even to the very end, the road that God had made unmistakably clear. The very next year he received from the ecclesiastical authorities full permission to found the "Brothers of the Christian School."

### *Youth of France*

While John Baptist was laying out his map of education and forming Christian schoolmasters into a religious community, Louis XIV, Le Roy Soleil, gave little thought to the youth of France. No attention was paid to country lads; they just grew up to follow the plow, pay their taxes, and die on the land. The rising generation were for the most

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

part little better off; youths loafed in the streets of cities, ne'er-do-wells could be found in every village. Their days were dark indeed, with nothing ahead save squalor and poverty. The lay teachers of the time appeared a sorry lot who looked after but two or three pupils and sought merely to eke out a bare existence. There was scant evidence of Christian conduct to be seen in their lives, not a sign of supernatural spirit. As late as 1686 the Bishop of Toul declared the schoolmasters of his diocese were "gamesters, drunkards, profligates, ignorant and brutal. They spend their time playing cards in the public houses or playing the violin in places of amusement or at village feasts. In the Churches they are not suitably dressed and instead of studying church music they sing during the services anything that comes into their heads." What then could be expected of such like? "One cannot wonder," said Vincent de Paul, "that there is but little trace of Christianity in their pupils' lives," and the saint declared he would gladly "beg from door to door to provide a living for a true schoolmaster." In plain words there was no outlook for the youth of France save a lawless future shot through with cruel violence.

The founder of the Christian Brothers, it will be recalled, had sensed all that and hesitated about taking up the staggering burden. Even when his will rebelled, God made clear, so to speak, these dreadful conditions so that John would freely choose what his Heavenly Father willed. And the young man had faced the task with zeal, resolved to spend himself in the service of the poor and ignorant. So you now see de la Salle hard at work with his little novitiate, building up a growing community. By 1688 he was in Paris, there to establish his work more permanently. At the time, as we have noted, there were pitifully few competent schoolmasters in sight; class-teaching was quite unknown, each

## *Saint John Baptist De La Salle and the Seventeenth Century*

child being instructed separately. Bush schools (*écoles buissonnières*) were conducted by charlatans in out-of-the-way places. Just as today, spurious instructors could be had for a price; they promised to teach music in ten lessons, Greek and Latin in three months, all sorts of subjects — grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, medicine, geography — almost overnight. John Baptist, characteristically, lost no time in meeting this ridiculous situation face to face. He and his brothers took over a school in the parish of San Sulpice, and the royal city saw the "*Frères Chrétiennes*" with their plain black cassocks, thick double-soled shoes, and broad-brimmed hats.

### *True Growth*

The seed, cast less than a decade earlier, had taken deep root and the tree was now a reality. A body of able Christian schoolmasters was formed into a religious community, which had its own regular novitiate, houses of studies, and homes for rest in old age. The soil in which they labored proved fertile and responsive, but it needs must be carefully weeded, the field strictly delimited, and the seed planted anew, year after year. The State, blind to its duty, was criminally negligent in the matter of the popular education that John Baptist essayed. Care had to be taken lest the roots be dwarfed and the organic growth impaired by too much spreading out into alien soil. De la Salle was the first in the history of education to cultivate elementary-school teaching as a scientific system. The schools he designed for poor boys taught no Latin, nor would he have his teachers encourage the study of the classics; they must be thoroughly efficient elementary teachers, and their schools genuine elementary schools, foundation schools, not half-baked high-schools or would-be colleges. The institute, thus intensively culti-

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

vated, began to grow beautifully, beyond all expectation. There were boarding-schools for homeless children; reformatory schools for the delinquent; even Sunday schools for those who had to work during the week-days. And all of these rested four-square on solid pedagogical foundations of elementary education.

It was evident that Heaven favored these unselfish laborers, for the tree came up and increased. More than that, root and trunk became stronger as time went on, and the branches spread far and wide. John Baptist gave the world the first training colleges; besides providing preparatory schools for lay masters who had no vocation to join his strictly religious community. He built up in his day an enduring machinery of popular education, perfect in all its departments. In it you can see every worthwhile element of the present public system antedated by fully two centuries. Did he encounter much hostility? Yes, plenty. The men who in that day utterly failed to see the unity of design in de la Salle's work, the power and efficiency in his united systematic action, were bigots who would have gladly harnessed the Christian Brothers to their plows. They had many evil-plotting successors, and those are they who in our day have brought about the downfall of France. Yet despite their vicious opposition the Christian Brothers were to endure through the centuries. The nations looked to them to learn how to educate the children of the poor; teachers eagerly sought their books, their methods, their masters. So it came to pass that the sometime Canon of Rheims accomplished the seeming impossible, blazing the first path of popular education through a wilderness of ignorance. And before John Baptist died, he had the consolation of seeing the seed grow into a great tree: the *Frères Chrétiens* numbered 274, and their pupils

## *Saint John Baptist De La Salle and the Seventeenth Century*

9,885. The tree continued to cast its branches until at the time of the Great Revolution it could count 36,000 pupils, no longer "ignorant tatterdemalions" but solid citizens in the making.

### *Church and State*

The France Joan of Arc saved for the Church had bravely weathered the sixteenth-century storm. But in this age of restored monarchy the Catholic spirit was weakened and impoverished. Henry IV (1589-1610) aiming to effect political absolutism, closed the era of religious wars. He granted liberty to Protestants and insisted that the Mass be restored in the two hundred fifty towns where the Huguenots had forbidden a Catholic service. Under Louis XIII, however, it was Richelieu who for eighteen years ruled the State with the iron glove. An amazing diplomat, this Minister of State, never deeply religious, was a dignitary to his finger tips, and he said he never lost hope of healing the division of the Church and "the churches." But like most men "of the earth, earthy," he lived and worked only for his own little day, having no vision of things to come. He shrank from no trickery to do away with any and all who stood in his way, nor did he scruple in putting innocent men to death. He had no political principles, had little use for clemency, and tolerated Calvinism, but never political opposition. All rival forces had to take a back seat, for he conceived the French monarchy to be above contending parties. "No dominant interest but the reason of the State," was Richelieu's absolutist view . . . "no authority but the sovereign, no will but his own." To revive the anti-Austrian policy he formed an alliance with Sweden and the Protestant states of Germany. And he saw to it that high offices of state were

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

tendered to Huguenots just so long as they helped extend the power of France. But when they rose against the crown, as in 1621, their political organization was ruthlessly suppressed. By 1628 their fortified towns capitulated and the Protestants began to emigrate beyond French borders.

After the death of Richelieu in 1642 the same policies were enforced by his protégé, the Sicilian Cardinal Mazarin. Then, in 1643, Louis XIV succeeded to the throne, and directly took things in his own hands. One idea possessed him — to deify his kingship as Henry VIII had done in England, and make the French omnipotent. Obviously he had picked a bad model and the aftermath was fraught with tragedy for society. "*L'état, c'est moi*" are the words often put into his mouth. And when Mazarin died, the young monarch informed his capable ministers that from then on they report to him as they had reported to the cardinal. The small states that fringed his territory — Belgium, Liege, Luxemburg, and Franche-Compté proved easy to control, but he regarded Austria and the Netherlands as enemies to be held in leash. Towards the Huguenots who took issue with the royal policy he showed as little mercy as did his former minister, Mazarin. They were excluded from the offices and dignities hitherto their treasured possessions; worse still the *dragonnade* ruling compelled them to billet French soldiers in their homes. The one thing the Grand Monarch seems to have feared was a break with Rome, yet he imposed his own drastic rules upon the Church; in 1769 apostate Catholics were penalized, and mixed marriages strictly forbidden. Less than ten years later he revoked the Edict of Nantes, causing a quarter of a million Huguenots to migrate to England, Holland and other countries. Just as Pope Innocent X resisted "The Most Catholic King" when he tried to exact a vassal's oath from all the ecclesiastics

## *Saint John Baptist De La Salle and the Seventeenth Century*

in France, Pope Alexander VII also frequently had to oppose the secularist policies he strove to enforce.

### *Signals of Danger*

But it was in 1682 that the gravest crisis arose. Not suddenly, for the seeds of the thing had long since been planted by Richelieu and his successor, Mazarin, whose brazen policies exempted the Catholic King as a bounden subject of the Pope. Indeed, all over Europe could be found anti-papal groups who had their own ideas about the discipline and doctrine of Rome. The liberties of the French dated back to Louis IX who gave protection to his ecclesiastics against the exactions of the royal officers and feudal counts. By degrees, however, those privileges were abused, and many of St. Louis' successors who were anything but saints tried to limit the papal jurisdiction. Of course, the Grand Monarch, sated with power, would have the spiritual yield to his temporal sway. The Assembly of the French Clergy met to support his pretensions and enacted the four articles of Gallican freedom in church affairs. These articles denied the Vicar of Christ authority over kings in anything but spiritual matters; held that the Pope is equally bound by canon law and by the laws of the French Church, insisted that his decisions in doctrine are infallible only when the whole Church concurs. One of their champions in this semi-Protestant contest with the papacy was Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux, a powerful prelate and able theologian who feared no man in controversy. Popes Innocent XI and Alexander VIII disciplined the rebellious clergy and the King eventually yielded up the four propositions adopted by his supporters. Yet the Gallican spirit took to the underground where it still lives, a century-old pest to Catholic law and order.

Behold John Baptist de la Salle in those days when the

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

Church in France appeared to be in such straits. Having resigned his canonry in 1683, he set to work to draw up the rule for the Christian Brothers. It took all of fifteen years, and during that time he had perfected it by patience and prayer, penance and fasting. A second needed step was to submit the whole thing to the older members of the community for criticism, correction and suggestions. They were free to judge, correct, make additions, yet when they returned it to John Baptist he found not a line had been altered. The fact is that except for a few minor items it has remained the Law of the Society to this very day. Few documents available to the historian throw such a flood of light on those times as this Rule, whose first article clearly sets forth the object of the Christian Brothers in the following words:

The object of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children, and it is for this purpose that schools are held, in order that the masters, who have charge of the children from morning to night, may bring them up to lead good lives, by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy Religion, and filling their minds with Christian maxims, while they give them such an education as is fitting for them.

This Institute is very greatly needed, because working people and the poor, who are generally but little instructed themselves, and are obliged to spend the whole day in working for their living and that of their children, cannot themselves give them the teaching which is necessary for them. It has been with a view to provide these advantages for the children of the poor, and of labouring men, that the Institution of the Christian Schools has been founded.

The disorderly lives of the working classes and of the poor are generally attributable to the fact that they have been badly brought up, and suffered to run wild in their childhood; and this evil it is almost impossible to repair in their more advanced years, because bad habits are very difficult to break, and are hardly ever quite cured, however great the pains which are taken to reform them. It

## *Saint John Baptist De La Salle and the Seventeenth Century*

is easy, therefore, to see the importance and usefulness of the Christian Schools, since to guard against these disorderly ways and their evil consequences is the principal fruit to be hoped for from their institution.<sup>1</sup>

Had that thoroughly Catholic spirit permeated the royal court the Great Revolution, so close at hand, would have died aborning. Instead, the long-scorned hatreds, squabbles and fears of "the Have-nots" continued to crop up everywhere, and Louis XIV never really came to know his own people, hence never was able to build a better nation. Not indeed until the wrath of God had fallen on this people with its pride, godlessness, and vast inequalities, would "the Haves" be brought to their knees.

### *The General Overturn*

France at the century-end was heading pell-mell for Tophet. And no wonder, when one considers the evils and abuses abroad, the injustice towards the poor and helpless. Think of the wealth and luxury flaunting themselves in the court of Louis XIV, on the streets of cities, in the castles in the countryside. Think also of the sufferings of the masses, the passionate cries of the underprivileged. Why, they asked themselves, why were the few so rich, the many so poor? And the answer came: the King, the court, the law allow it. What then was more likely than the angry resolve, "Away with the King and his court and his nobles who reap where they never sowed, who eat what they never worked for." Added to the reckless confusion, anti-Christian philosophers attacked the only power of true reform, the Catholic Church. They prated loudly of liberty and equality, of the rights of men, and almost in the same breath said of the laboring people, "They are like oxen, all they require is a goad, a yoke

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Brothers*, Wilson, pp. 122-123

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

and some hay." One cannot miss the contrast between such heralds of revolt and the men and women of God who sought to allay the suffering of the downtrodden. "You see, dear Brothers," said the Archbishop of Arles at the opening of a Christian Brothers' school, "you see the eagerness with which you are welcomed, every face is radiant with joy; you are come to teach the poor, that precious portion of the flock of Jesus Christ, which the Divine Shepherd cherished so tenderly, and which after His example, you too love from the bottom of your hearts." If only that spirit of service had prevailed, France so far gone in infamy, might have been saved. But it was the old old story of the wolf and the lamb which history is ever repeating: though the lamb is in the right, the wolf gets the better of him.

By now an artificial and sordid age was nearing its end, the very principles of justice had collapsed. "If indeed ye be judges," Heaven declared, "pronounce verdicts, judge what is just, ye men." It was because of their failure so to act that the rulers of France brought upon themselves "the abomination that makes desolate." The Revolution was an uprising of the nameless multitude against the privileged classes of the nation. Had the Church been able to have her way it might have been otherwise, but she found herself thwarted at every turn. So many of her faithless children betrayed her, so many of her priests became ignorant and worldly that religion had wellnigh lost its power among the middle and lower classes of the population. The great work done for the poor "nobodies" of France by the new religious communities of heroic men and women was offset a thousand to one by evil-doers in high places. The moral and conservative influence exercised by the God-fearing could not successfully contend with the spirit of infidelity. As early as 1688, pre-echoes of grim days to come could be heard in the violent

*Saint John Baptist De La Salle and the Seventeenth Century*

quarrels, the fanatical proclamations, the brutal verdicts visited upon innocent and religious people. The nation seethed with discontent; the toilers despaired of finding any redress for their grievances. And though revolution was in the very air the Crown never paused to consider the plight of the common people. Louis XIV actually practiced what a later dictator Napoleon proclaimed, "I am not a man like other men and the laws of morality and decorum could not be intended to apply to me." Yet when the hour of death approached he whispered to the weeping servants at his bedside, "Did you think me immortal? I never did." Too late now for the lonely superman to repair the evils he had brought upon his people, evils which all the flatteries of the poet Racine, the dramatist Moliere, the preacher Bossuet never could undo. A new order must come, said the mob, and France under the urge of revolution slowly drifted on towards "the mad fool-fury of the Seine."



Saint John Baptist Di Rossi

PARAGON OF PRIESTLINESS

# SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DI ROSSI AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

<i>Kings of France</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
LOUIS XIV, -1715	War of the Spanish Succession	CLEMENT XI, 1700-1721
	Childhood of John Baptist di Rossi	
	Spread of Jansenism	
	Di Rossi at the Roman College	
	Birth of Jean Jacques Rousseau	
	Birth of Diderot	
	Peter the Great's Prussian war-machine	
	Death of Louis XIV	
	English conquest of India (1718-1726)	
	Di Rossi ordained to priesthood	
LOUIS XV, 1715-1774	Moravians in Germany	INNOCENT XIII, 1721-1724
	Rise of Wesleyanism in England	
	Persecution in China	BENEDICT XIII, 1724-1730
	Di Rossi founds hospice for unfortunates	CLEMENT XII, 1730-1740
	Alphonsus Ligouri founds Redemptorists	
	Di Rossi Canon of St. Maria	BENEDICT XIV, 1740-1758
	Birth of Tom Paine	
	Clement XII condemns Freemasons	
	Frederick the Great ready to strike	
	Birth of Paley	
	St. Paul of Cross founds Passionists	
	Birth of Goethe	
	Jansenism condemned by Pope	
	Seven Years War (1756-1763)	
	Jesuits expelled from Portugal	CLEMENT XIII, 1758-1769
	Di Rossi broken in health	
	Death of di Rossi	CLEMENT XIV, 1769-1774
	Jesuits expelled from France	
	Jesuits expelled from Spain	
	Birth of Napoleon Bonaparte	
	Persecution in England and Ireland	
	First Partition of Poland	
	Society of Jesus abolished by the Pope	
LOUIS XVI, 1774-1793 (d. 1795)	American Revolution	PIUS V, 1775-1799
	Paine's "Age of Reason"	
	Death of St. Alphonsus Ligouri	
	Pius V recognizes Prussia	
	French Revolution (1789-1795)	
	Second Partition of Poland	
	Louis XVI dies on the scaffold	
	Third Partition of Poland	
	The Directory	
	Napoleon invades Papal States	
	Irish Rebellion	
	Napoleon in Syria	

## SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DI ROSSI AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

### *The Sordid Century*

"The State," said Plato, "is only man writ large." And as the State in this century was absolutist, acknowledging no law but its own, we see man doing the same thing. "If only the Church could be done away with," opined the rulers, "then politics would no longer be held fast by religion." "If only we could suppress revealed truth," boasted the atheists, "revolution could march on to certain victory." In Germany there existed a blind Lutheran hatred of any pre-Lutheran Christianity, together with a strong trend towards stark naturalism, parading under the term "Illumination." The so-called "System of Nature," taught by the Teuton, Baron Holbach (1723-1789), had no place for God, freedom, or the future life; so too Helvitius (1715-1771) who denied miracles, even revelation, regarded virtue as mere self-interest, and sowed the bitter seeds of a barren scepticism. The Deists in England — Locke, Hume, Reid — advocated a destructive rationalism; their followers in France fell still lower into atheism and materialism. Vain, witty and brilliant, Voltaire (1694-1778) displayed a blind antipathy to the Christian faith, jeered and mocked the Church and set himself up as a smart opponent of the Word of God. Then there was Diderot (1713-1784) and the Encyclopedists, smart infidels who dominated the thoughts of the higher classes of society. But the greatest damage was done by Rousseau (1712-1788) whose writings started the fires of the Revolution. This would-be reformer, married to an illiterate bar-maid, sent his own children to a foundling asylum, and in the end became

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

insane. His "*Confessions*" with their disgusting claims to early vices; his "*Emile*," a treatise on education in the form of a novel, embodied the author's sentimental deism. Now it is abundantly evident that crooked thought leads to crooked action, which in turn leads to more crooked thought. That was the way of millions infected with evil doctrines. The rank and file, like their masters, scoffed at faith and virtue, set light store by any values except self. Black reaction followed, the murderous mob was turned loose, and revolution marked the close of the century.

Let us try to visualize the political aspects, the spiritual decadence in those days. The soil of European thought produced poisoned fungi; morals were fast going to rot; life itself was regarded as something mean, shallow, unsatisfying. All the anti-Christianities had produced nothing but disorder and profound cynicism in high and low places. Under such circumstances the Church was persecuted by monarchs and their ministers, and you see states like Portugal, Spain and France devoid of Catholic honor, driving the Society of Jesus from their borders. Look at the grim, godless situation elsewhere in Europe — the same decay of virtue, the same dwindling of faith. England found herself at a low religious ebb; money-mad and lusting for power, she set out to conquer India while she persecuted her Catholic subjects at home and in Ireland. In Germany, masonic groups throve in their opposition to the Church and Christian civilization; while in Prussia, Peter the Great built up a great army, then his son Frederick, failing to subdue stronger nations, joined with Austria and Russia to crush little Poland. As time passed, France fast became lawless, what with the grandeur and decadence of the court of Louis XV and the spreading corruption in the reign of Louis XVI. The Church suffered dreadful calamities on every side while the clergy were

## *Saint John Baptist Di Rossi and the Eighteenth Century*

forever quarrelling and leaving the citadel of the faith wide-open to the foe. License, not zeal for freedom, marked the times, along with utter disillusionment in profligate upper society. It was, in short, an age of barbarism and cheapness, of self-satisfaction and desperation. One revolution followed upon another, until the Six Terrible Years, 1789-1795, witnessed the wild orgies of the mob, the ghastly violence of madmen who, under the name of liberty, did vastly more evil than good.

### *Ordeal of Youth*

The life of St. John Baptist di Rossi, cast in such drab days, should prove a helpful foreground to our study of these conditions. Side by side with him, one can traverse over half the century and survey its history. He was born in 1698 at Voltaggio in the diocese of Genoa, of devout Catholic parents who, though poor in the world's goods, were highly esteemed by their fellow citizens. Even as a child, he gave such evidence of deep piety and winning gentleness that folk were irresistibly drawn to love him. At ten he was taken to Genoa for his education and while there suffered a great loss in the death of his father. In 1712, after spending three years in Genoa, he was sent to Rome at the urgent request of his cousin, Lorenzo di Rossi, a canon at S. Maria in Cosmedin. This step was to prove vitally important, and it was a blessed day when di Rossi saw the Eternal City for the first time. Imagine the impressions that crowded his soul, the contrasts he could draw between Italy north and south. His eyes, you may be sure, were wide-open, his mind most expansive. At Genoa there was nothing but strife; here in the Rome of Pope Clement XI everything was tranquil; great schools, art works in abundance, splendid buildings rising under papal direction. Up north, there were bitter echoes of

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the War of the Spanish Succession which began in Italy. The Austrians, led by Prince Eugene, attempted to take Milan, but the Duke of Savoy aided the French in repelling their advances. Then they returned, routed the French, and proceeded to dominate the peninsula. Louis XIV, weary and inert, had lost his grip on things, and the armies of England and Austria piled up victory on victory. Di Rossi, ever alert in the interests of his Holy Mother, must have pondered the sad state of affairs. There was one other thing that must have hit him hard: the utter indifference of Catholic rulers to the authority of the Pope. All the immemorial rights of the Holy See were ignored; the clergy in Sicily suffered persecution; the papal nuncio was driven out of Madrid; the French ambassador quit Rome in a huff, murmuring out of the side of his mouth that the city was no longer the seat of the Church. Yet Rome, oddly enough, enjoyed comparative freedom from the turmoil that over-spread Europe.

John Baptist was very young when he entered the *Collegium Romanum* to pursue his studies under the direction of the Jesuits. Ever conscious of splendid opportunities, he quickly responded to the models and ideas set before him. No one in the school valued the zeal, sanctity and scholarship of these teachers more than the newcomer from diocese of Genoa. Not only did their words find rich soil in his heart, there to ripen into thoughts and actions, but the unforgettable example of noble souls provided him with basic resolves for his own future life. All over Europe the Society of Jesus was famous for its great schools; they virtually controlled the universities at Vienna and Rome, and had the ablest instructors in Europe. Yet, even when di Rossi sat at their feet, the clouds of persecution had begun to gather on the horizon.

### *Saint John Baptist Di Rossi and the Eighteenth Century*

It was no use trying not to take sides with these black-cassocked men whose natures and instincts were so heroic and John, just as much himself as ever, had the deepest admiration for their candor and courage. He knew only too well what kind of enemy they were fighting and he resolved with God's grace to throw his whole weight into the battle for truth. His teachers sized him up as a young man energetic and full of spirit, talented, virtuous and determined. And his classmates knew him for one who despised the soft and effeminate, gave himself up to Spartan training, labored to become a saint. Di Rossi was the sort of fellow they could not help liking, entirely apart from his brilliant success as a scholar. He had a way of seeing the best in all his companions, and a knack of diverting them from objectionable recreations; they never knew what would happen next once he started on his charities. As a member of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin, and other religious societies, he stood out as a model, always alive and active. They bestowed on him the title "the Apostle" inasmuch as he was forever leading them on to visit the sick in Roman hospitals and showing them the way of mercy and loving kindness.

Dogged does it! is the story of John's progress in those difficult days. He was just as dogged in fighting ill-health as in urging his school companions on to good works. They did not know that their schoolmate from the north was wont to practice the most severe penances, as a result of which he fell dangerously ill and was obliged to cut down his studies. At sixteen, having finished the Jesuit course, he entered the College of the Dominicans to concentrate on scholastic philosophy and theology. The fact that he fell victim to attacks of epilepsy did not deter di Rossi who showed extraordinary fortitude along with unceasing application. He was

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

still sixteen when he entered the clerical state and during those days had ample opportunity of knowing much of Clement XI, who was to reign in the Chair of Peter longer than any Vicar of Christ since the twelfth century. One may be sure that this Pope with his profound generosity, his works of charity and piety, inspired the young Genoese. All Rome knew that Clement never let down on his ideals, never spared his energy for doing good. Aware of his great responsibilities, he exercised his authority in the most human and patriarchal way. He saw through the power-hungry rulers as well as the demagogues, and he took sides with France, though this cost him the ill-will of the Emperor and his regal abettors. Any dreams for unity among Catholic nations, however, came to naught. The Emperor allied himself to the Protestant Kingdom of Prussia; the Pope suffered one trial after another from countless disloyal rulers. He died in 1721 and in March of that same year John Baptist received the priesthood. The newly-ordained had long studied sainthood, his character turning always towards that ideal. Now he was ready to take up arms like a good soldier of Jesus Christ. One of his first steps to save himself from worldly enslavement was to shun honors and eschew all ambition. To clinch this resolve, he bound himself by a special vow never to accept any church benefice, but to spend the rest of his days in humble service of the poor and sick. You find him morning and night among the teamsters laboring on the Campagna. They got to like this fearless, outspoken servant of God who trailed them like a watchdog. Lest they catch his sickness he avoided hearing confessions of his converts, sending other priests in his place. In 1738, after a desperate illness, he went for a rest to Civita Castellana, an hour out of Rome. The bishop of the place, knowing his man, urged Father di Rossi to enter the sacred tribunal and he did, working

### *Saint John Baptist Di Rossi and the Eighteenth Century*

with such zeal as to win the privilege of administering the Sacrament in any and all the churches of Rome.

### *The Menace of Prussia*

While the young priest devoted himself unsparingly to the service of his fellowmen there loomed far to the north the dark cloud of Prussianism. Pope Clement's successor had every reason to fear this menace even more than the danger of decadent France. The Prussian people dwelt in Brandenburg, a cold stark country, where Nature seemed as harsh as themselves. They were a race submissive to authority, ready to suffer for their state which alone could sustain them. Under the spell of brutal war-lords they became a bold, aggressive lot who worshipped the powers that could encourage their outspokenness. Since their country was Lutheran, they welcomed the first Huguenot refugees from France even as they later welcomed the anti-Catholic Hollanders. The result was that by the time of Peter the Great this northern state quite ruled the Protestant interest in Germany. There was trouble ahead at this stage, for the new King, the real father of German militarism, went all out for an absolute monarchy. Like a madman he levied heavy taxes to fill his war chest and built up a fighting machine — eighty-three thousand men — to increase his power first at home, then abroad. His big idea was to make Prussia supreme in Germany, and that of course involved enormous expenditure. "When my son comes to the throne," he declared, "he must find the vaults crowded with gold." Well, the day that son, Frederick the Great, succeeded he found the vaults overflowing with eight million thalers and an army able to support the power and glory of Prussia. As crown prince, Frederick was a mere backwoods dilettante in art, music and literature, and scarcely knew any French or Latin. But once in the royal saddle he

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

displayed a practical genius and proved himself a first-rate soldier, daring as he was unscrupulous. Indeed, the son of Peter the Great quickly learned how to surpass the quite barbarous father who had taught him. The slippery schemer made himself master of Silicia — an outright steal; yet he ached to win further spoils. No code existed by which Frederick could be called to book, and he had the army to gratify any tyrant's desires. The blunt and terrible fact is that all the states in this sordid age were absolutist in their own eyes. It meant nothing to rulers to commit robbery or murder or any act against a neighbor so long as the thing was done in the public service.

What with the Prussian threat and the atheists of Europe getting in their dirty work, things were in a bad way. When Peter the Great was building up his war-machine, Pope Benedict XIII (1724-1730) found himself in the midst of turmoil. He was seventy-five when elected by the conclave, unused to duties of state, and too old to change his monastic ways of life. The strange thing was he left the conduct of papal affairs in the hands of knaves while he spent hours in the chapel, heard confessions in St. Peter's, visited and comforted the sick. One wonders if John Baptist di Rossi knew him very well in those years when the papacy skirted nearer the edge of tragedy. Like the Pope the zealous priest was wont to visit every poor corner of Rome. "He spent several hours a day in hearing the confessions of the illiterate, and visited in their homes or in hospitals, the sick, and especially the consumptives, of whom he spoke as his own. He hurried about the city and took part in countless good works, but was especially careful in visiting the hospital of St. Galla, to help in every way he could the poor, whom he held as a special object of affection." <sup>1</sup> John heroically continued the exhaust-

<sup>1</sup> Second Nocturn of St. J. B. di Rossi

## *Saint John Baptist Di Rossi and the Eighteenth Century*

ing routine of his mercy-tasks, but at what cost to his nervous energy! The thoughts that chiefly occupied his mind were service of God, service of his neighbor; the Church wanted social justice within the nations and the best place to begin was at home. He knew that he would die at the task but also knew that he would live, and sought only to redeem the time to the best of his ability. By 1730 when John was in his early thirties, a new Pope, Clement XII, had set about cleaning house, and Frederick the Great waited the opportunity for swift conquest, waited like a tiger in his lair. The eighty-year-old pontiff, nothing daunted, pursued policies with vigor and initiative. He made it his business to punish the renegade Cardinal Coscia who, having drawn wool over the eyes of the previous Pope, looted the treasury and fled to Naples. A bull, *in Eminenti*, was issued, fearlessly condemning Freemasonry, so hostile to both civil and ecclesiastical authority. And among other things, he tried to compose the differences between Genoa and Corsica; between Charles of Bourbon and the Imperialists. But, sad to say, his advice was ignored by Catholic princes and governments, in consequence of which they paid a harsh penalty; for while their powers decreased, the Protestant nations gained more and more strength.

### *This Vale of Tears*

With the forties the European scene began to change rapidly. Rome, however, still enjoyed the strange calm that precedes the coming of a fierce storm. Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758) began an illustrious reign, winning the respect of both Catholic and Protestant governments. Even in Protestant England, Horace Walpole spoke of him as "a man whom neither wit nor power could spoil," and the impossible Voltaire paid tribute to him as "the pride of Rome and the father of the world, who taught mankind by his writing and

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

honored it by his virtues." The Prussian Frederick and the Sultan of Turkey, admiring his tolerance, were glad to correspond with this Pope whose good will and moderation enabled him to achieve many things. "We desire most intensely," he declared anent the Eastern Catholics, "that all should be Catholics but not that all should be Latins"; and he would allow no changes to be made in the ancient eastern practices. The vexed question of the "Malabar customs," employed by the Jesuits in India, he did not condemn, and he sought with fine tact to stave off the relentless opposition of other missionary orders. "Peace, not the sword!" was his watchword, and when he died a sharp observer said: "Marvel of marvels! The people speak no evil of a dead Pope!"

But scarce had the able and amiable Benedict been buried in St. Peter's than the long-threatened attack on the Jesuits was launched in full force. In this, the second century of their existence, the sons of Ignatius had run afoul of many determined foes; first the absolutist sovereigns, next the embittered Jansenists, finally the freethinkers, followers of Voltaire and Rousseau. The successes of the society had in all truth stirred bitter jealousy and active hatred in many quarters. They were accused of secret interference in political affairs, as well as of part-time missionary exploitations in trade and commerce. In the Spanish peninsula they certainly possessed enormous influence; as teachers in schools and universities, as father-confessors of kings and princes they enjoyed great prestige. It is clear also that their power had become enviable in the most evil sense of that word. In Portugal particularly, Pombal, the minister of King Joseph Emmanuel, resented their influence at court and cold-bloodedly plotted to drive them out of the country. The crisis came in 1753 when by a treaty between Spain and Portugal, the Jesuit built and ruled provinces in Paraguay

*Saint John Baptist Di Rossi and the Eighteenth Century*

exchanged hands. An attempt by Brazil to take over these parts met with violent opposition, instigated, it was alleged, by their guides. Pombal saw his chance and took revenge by dismissing the Jesuits from the royal family where they served as chaplains; not content with this blow he further accused them of complicity in a plot to assassinate the King. A royal decree was then issued by which they were driven from all their schools and banished not only from Portugal but even from its overseas dependencies which could not have existed save for their heroic, unselfish labors. The charges were, of course, ill-founded, the expulsion unwarranted. Yet Pombal saw to it that in Portugal three of the fathers were condemned to death, others imprisoned, the rest loaded aboard ships. He saw to it, too, that they were packed like cattle into over-crowded holds and conveyed to Italy. "A present to the Pope," his voice derided them, as he looked on at the cruel embarkation.

One can easily imagine the feeling of Father di Rossi upon hearing of such indignities and seeing those lonely tattered refugees, anguishingly astray in the streets of Rome. What stupidity, treachery, cowardice, had been expended on these loyal militia of the Holy See. They had courage, however, he must have felt, and di Rossi understood that no soldier in the world is better than his readiness to suffer and his willingness to die. He was now in his sixty-first year, this good soldier of Christ, broken in health, exhausted by a life of apostolic labor, very soon to break the bonds of his exile on earth. The salient events of his career are briefly recorded in that eternally worth while "Who's Who," the Roman Breviary. "From his fifteenth year," we quote from the second nocturn, "he was joined to a body of Priests whose special work was preaching to the poor, with them he learnt his apostleship, and he arranged and disseminated their labours.

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

The same pity caused him to spend his modest substance in relieving the necessities of the needy. He left behind him abiding fruits of his unwearied zeal for the instruction of servants, wanderers, and the illiterate classes for the holy celebration of Easter, an home of refuge for the safe keeping of the lost women who wander through the city by night, but above all the earnestness for the salvation of souls aroused among the clergy. The brightness of his love of God shone forth in his face while he was officiating, and he could not speak of His goodness without tears. He was forced, out of obedience, to accept a Canon's stall in the collegiate church of S. Maria in Cosmedine, and during the psalmody he seemed to become entranced. He was very careful as to the sacred ceremonies, sought the beauty of the house of God, and freely contributed of his means to that object. He communicated to others his own love towards the Mother of God, and promoted her worship in his own church, where he instituted a daily sermon in her honour, in addition to her Office. He sought to fill himself with the spirit of Philip Neri, and while he was devout towards all the dwellers in heaven, he promoted increased honour for the princes of the Apostles; he was constant in prayer and in every good work, and rich in gifts of grace. At length in the hospital called that of the Most Holy Trinity, whither he had withdrawn to live along with the Priests, broken down by work, he reached the end of life, and when he had received the sacraments of the Church, and again exhorted to works of charity and to the care of the poor, he died in the Lord's kiss upon the 23rd day of May, in the year of Christ 1764, and of his own age the sixty-sixth."<sup>1</sup>

### *Might vs. Right*

Long before the century reached mid-point the nations gambled away their greatest chances. They had been a law

<sup>1</sup> *Bute, tr., Roman Breviary, Vol. III, p. 573*

### *Saint John Baptist Di Rossi and the Eighteenth Century*

unto themselves, had done despicable things that cried to Heaven for vengeance. Any aggression against a neighboring state, any swift conquest by one power met with sullen resentment on the part of the others. Everyone was doing it; even the Seven Years War was just another case of grab-hold-keep and let the devil take the hindermost. That was absolutism for you — full of envy, hatred, and injustice — and it was digging its own grave. The Church, meanwhile, had to contend with wily foes who would tie her hands. Louis XV under the influence of his mistress, Madame de Pompadour, and her time-serving courtiers, issued edict after edict against the Jesuits and in 1767 drove them out of France.

That same year six thousand members were deported from Spain, while Naples and Parma followed the same shameful policy. Not content with such persecution, the Bourbon courts united to induce Pope Clement XIV to abolish the Society. This Pope had been their candidate, and no sooner had he reached the Throne of Peter than the Spanish and French ambassadors tried to force his hand. It is said that Clement self-pityingly regarded such a drastic measure as signing his own death-warrant; he staved off the issue for a time, then the ambassadors, as foul as ever, threatened a schism. In 1773 he gave way under pressure and issued the cruel brief, *Dominus ac Redemptor noster*. "Impelled by the duty of restoring harmony in the Church," it ran, "convinced that the Society of Jesus can no longer fulfil the purposes for which it was founded and moved by other reasons of prudence and governmental policy which we keep to ourselves we abolish and annul the Society of Jesus with its offices, houses and institutions." The members of the greatest body of teachers in the Church took the blow bravely, and submitted to the papal authority they were sworn to obey. Their general, Father Ricci, suffered imprisonment in the Castle of

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

St. Angelo, the rest of the society were scattered, but continued their priestly work here, there, and everywhere. No more eloquent commentary could be made on the whole tragic affair than the fact that two monarchs, Frederick II of Prussia, a Protestant, and the Orthodox Catherine II of Russia, protested the edict and declared it would have no force within their states.

Let us go back about three or more years before the suppression of the Jesuits. The powers to the east — Austria, Prussia and Russia — bent on extending their domains, were spoiling for a war. Each eyed the other with suspicion and mistrust, but the wily Frederick met the Emperor half-way to see what could be done to curb Russia's growing power. Great stakes were in play, nothing less than the broad fields of Poland. This was in 1770; the next year Catherine II of Russia said to Frederick's brother in Petersburg: "Austria has taken part of Poland; why should not Prussia and Russia do the same?" So Poland, unable to defend herself, was destined to become the prey to the three royal robbers. A country Catholic to the core, Poland's strength lay not in weapons of war but in the spirited defence and true worship of the doctrines of the Church. The impact of these three armies, like three giants, shook the country from end to end, as they marched in. By 1772 the weak defenceless state was partitioned. The Emperor of Austria grabbed a slice, comprising Silicia, the south of Little Poland and parts of Podolia; the King of Prussia seized a huge piece of the northern part; and Catherine II of Russia took most of the rest. All in all it was a cowardly, dastardly trick, an outrage that succeeded without a protest from the other powers. The "modern" men who ruled France had no love for a Poland still old-world, faithful, and loyal to the Church. They were just as well satisfied that the Catholic country should be wiped off the map. And

### *Saint John Baptist Di Rossi and the Eighteenth Century*

England showed not a whit more humanity; nay, she approved of the land-grab. Was she not trying out her own injustice at this very time on the American colonies? But the handwriting had begun dimly to appear on the wall of absolute monarchy.

#### *Hint of Dawn*

The strong current of freedom ran on at this time, more than meeting the counter-current of despotism. There was humanity and liberty in the air; signs that governments were waking up to the general good of the people. An increasing growth of popular education appeared, accompanied by measures to relieve the poor and by the building of hospitals. The generality of folk were resolved to continue and intensify the demand for decency, and their aspirations were directed towards a just rule. They had begun to doubt the morality of the slave trade; they demanded reform of the vile prison system; they resented the appalling treatment of serfs. Yes, the tyrant rulers actually saw, heard, and began to be enlightened — all the way from Spain to Russia, from Italy to England. "A King is the first servant of the state," said Frederick the Great as he passed from war-waging to the peace-making phase of his career. It was very late, too late in the day, and he did not see that absolute monarchy had outlived its time. One ruler did, one only, and that was Leopold of Tuscany who sensed the great change coming over Europe and knew as Emperor (1790) that the old power must give way to the securities of freedom. George III found that out too when he tried to revive the divine right of kings, but it needed America to teach him the lesson. In England there were riots and mobs, protesting the political corruption. A gradual letdown in the penal laws against Roman Catholics and non-conformists enabled the persecuted to have their

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

grievances redressed, but Parliament still shirked its duty of asserting religious liberty as the right of British subjects. Indeed, it would require a hundred more years to blot out the penal code and establish freedom of worship.

While states perforce had to take account of public interests, the attitude towards the Church became increasingly hostile. The ruling classes showed little if any reverence for the Vicar of Christ; a decadent society had outgrown the virtue of reverence. For ten years after the expulsion of the Jesuits, Portugal bitterly opposed the papacy. The Emperor, Joseph II of Austria, approved Febronius' writings which denied the Pope's authority in other dioceses than his own and restricted his rights in dealing with the bishops. His Imperial Highness insisted that the Church must be governed by the sovereign in all matters of external government and worship; nor could the Pope confer any titles except with his august approval. This movement to limit the jurisdiction of the Holy See spread rapidly to Germany where bishops were empowered to try their own cases, with or without the consent of the Vatican. In Rome, Pope Pius VI (1775-1799) encountered the hostility, nay treachery of powerful Italian prelates who sought utter independence, and joined with the Germans in anti-papal intrigues. And as for France, the King and the nobles showed corrupt to the core; their utter lack of religious conviction left the way open to damningly effective free-thinking, and the middle and lower classes steadily lost their faith. There were countless priests who preferred to champion "human rights" and "the sovereignty of the people" rather than labor diligently among their flocks for the peace on earth that comes only to men of good will. Wild theories of secular reform stemmed from the poisoned fungi planted by atheists in the various countries. The common people were so misled that it is little wonder they

### *Saint John Baptist Di Rossi and the Eighteenth Century*

displayed an avowed scorn of religion. Indeed, the picture Dean Swift draws of the Protestant Anglo-Irish scene could equally be applied to all Europe: "Hardly one in a hundred among our people of quality or gentry appears to act by any principle of religion; nor is the case much better with the vulgar."

### *Seven Savage Years*

As the sordid century drew to a close, vice went hand in hand with lawlessness. The European stage was set for the bloodiest revolution in modern times. It came in 1789, when France had reached the end of her tether, and her people were degraded into madness. An empty public treasury brought the States-General together, and they decided upon a radical change. The deliberations became disorderly; in no time the government lost control of the tiller and the constitution was overthrown. Things were now in the hands of Voltaire's followers who planned to do away with the servile state and vowed the destruction of Christianity. The Assembly, amid the roars of the mob, proclaimed freedom of worship. All church properties were confiscated, and the clergy required to swear allegiance to the new constitution. In 1790 all monks and nuns in France were released from their vows and religious societies dissolved except those who would submit to the new education, and the new Constitution of the Clergy. With 130 sees reduced to 83, bishops and parish priests had to be "elected," and, of course, subscribe to the new law. One-third of them took the oath; 46,000 refused to have any part in it. The next year, 1791, Pope Pius VI, having rejected the new Constitution, paid the penalty with the loss of Avignon and Venassin.

The dastardly activities of the Assembly changed hands in 1792, when the work of demolition, ecclesiastical and civil,

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

was left to the Convention. All religious corporations were abolished, the wearing of the cassock prohibited, and every "suspect" non-juror condemned to banishment, a measure which drove 40,000 persons out of the country. At Paris there was revolution and massacre which cost the lives of 300 of the clergy, 1200 of the citizens; and these same rabid measures quickly spread through the provinces. Before the fifth year of the Revolution had well begun the state of affairs became increasingly tragic. The heads of Louis XVI and his Queen were severed at the scaffold in January 1793, and many a revolutionary leader suffered the same grim fate. Mobs ran riot in the cities and provinces, while the wild march of the irreligious destroyers continued unchecked. To cap the anti-Christian proceedings a girl from the opera was enthroned on the altar in the great cathedral of Notre Dame; a delirious, lust-maddened crowd saluted the wanton creature as the "goddess of reason." The supremacy of atheism, however, was short-lived; for in the midst of the Reign of Terror, Robespierre acknowledged a Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul. Then the fall of this deist leader and the rise of the Directory suddenly put an end to the government's meddling with religion. As the Seven Terrible Years came to an end, Napoleon Bonaparte rode high in the saddle. One night two French officers broke in upon the eighty-two-year-old Pope, Pius VI, stripped him of his ring, and carried him away captive. He was taken across the Alps to Valence in France where in 1799 he breathed his last. The haters of Rome, having wreaked their fury and malice on a holy old man, thought that the papacy was done for, and that Pius VI, the 248th pope would be the last! Could there be a more startling commentary on the tragic history of those times?

# Saint John Baptist Vianney

MARVEL OF THE WORLD

# SAINT JOHN BAPTIST VIANNEY AND THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

<i>Kingdoms, Empires and Republics</i>	<i>Persons, Places and Events</i>	<i>Vicars of Christ</i>
EMPIRE OF FRANCE	Concordat with France 1801	PIUS VII, 1800-1823
	France an Empire 1804	
FIRST (French) REPUBLIC	Freemasons control Spain 1805	LEO XII, 1823-1829
	John Baptist, a farmhand, goes to school 1805	
	End of Holy Roman Empire 1806	
	Napoleon seizes Pius VII 1809	
	John Baptist in the Seminary 1812	
	Revival of Jesuits 1814	
	Battle of Waterloo 1815	
	Papal State restored 1815	
	John Baptist ordained to priesthood 1815	
	John Baptist, parish priest of Ars 1818	
	John Baptist begins a forty-year fast 1819	
	Napoleon dies in exile 1821	
	Portugal seizes church property 1822	
	John Baptist founds "La Providence" 1825	
	Russia persecutes Catholics 1825	
	England emancipates Catholics 1829	
	John Baptist director of souls 1830	
	"July Revolution" in France 1830	
	Belgium becomes independent of Holland 1831	
	Jesuits expelled from Portugal 1834	
	Spoilation in Switzerland and Piedmont 1835	
	Jesuits expelled from Spain 1837	
	Conversion of John Henry Newman 1845	
	John Baptist the Great Confessor of France 1845	
	Pius IX exiled from Rome 1848	
	Threat of Socialism 1848	
	Hierarchy established in Holland 1853	
	Immaculate Conception defined 1854	
	Crimean War 1854	
GERMAN EMPIRE	John Baptist, a Knight of the Legion of Honor 1855	PIUS IX, 1846-1878
	Austrian Concordat with Church 1855	
	Opening of Japan 1855	
	Death of John Baptist at Ars 1859	
	United Italy 1861	
	Poland revolts 1863	
	Fenian Revolt in Ireland 1866	
	Austro-Prussian War 1866	
	Vatican Council 1870	
	Year of the Great Crisis 1870	
	Franco-Prussian War 1870	
	Italians seize Rome 1870	
SPANISH REPUBLIC	German Empire 1871	LEO XIII, 1878-1903
	German persecution of Church (Kultur-kampf) 1873	
	Spain a Republic 1873	
	Russo-Turkish War 1878	
	Triple Alliance 1882	
	Leo XIII condemns Freemasonry 1884	
	Bismarck's Defeat "at Canossa" 1887	
	Pope supports the French Republic 1892	
	Latin American Council 1899	
	Hague Conference for Peace 1899	

## SAINT JOHN VIANNEY AND THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

### *A Plowboy of Destiny*

The first rumblings of revolution were disturbing France when a saint was born in Dardilly near Lyons in the year 1786. One of six children, John Vianney could thank God for very devout parents who dwelt in sincerity and justice all their days. The hospitality of this pious family was great for their slender means, and all sorts of beggars came to their door. Though John seemed to inherit a lovely spirit of charity from his infant years, he grew up with little Catholic schooling, all religious teachers having been driven from their posts by the anti-clericals. If by singular good luck fugitive priests entered the district, the Vianney family journeyed secretly all the way to Ecully to attend Mass. So swift were those meetings that the altar had to be set up in a barn or some upper room. No doubt the little lad was deeply stirred by such experiences, as by the faith and heroism of his elders, ready to risk their lives for the sake of Christ. At thirteen he made his First Communion in a poor hiding place — a shed, used as a chapel, and from that time on he rose spiritually from height to height. It was amazing how ever mindful he became of the presence of God, even while at work in the fields with his brothers and sisters. "When I was alone, mattock and spade in hand," the saint recalled later, "I prayed aloud; when I was in company, I prayed under my breath. . . . I used to lie down on the ground like the rest and pretended to sleep, but I was praying with all my heart! Ah! it was a happy time." John was nineteen, and still a farm hand, when in 1805 he entered a little school

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

opened in Ecull for ecclesiastical students. Not over-bright in his studies, he had to wrestle hard and long with arithmetic, geography and history, finding Latin far from easy. But he had a companion, Matthias Doras, who gave him a hand with his books; this same kindly helper later became Bishop of Dubuque, Iowa. In that day the humble school and its handful of pupils were lost in the picture of a war-bent nation. The eyes of Europe centered on the incredible Napoleon Bonaparte who flashed across the scene like a meteor. By sheer military genius the young Corsican won victory after victory; then at twenty-three returned to France and harnessed the revolutionists to his battle-wagons.

The plowboy student could not hope to escape the edge of strife. His school was in the diocese of Cardinal Fesh, an uncle of Napoleon, who was now lashing out against Spain. All France stood at arms, and the conqueror, urgently in need of troops, cancelled the exemption enjoyed by ecclesiastical students. Boys had to be recruited for his companies, mere youngsters to rig the guns and fix the bayonets; that meant John Vianney must, willy-nilly, enter the ranks, his father being too poor to pay for a substitute. So the pupil laid down his books to join a regiment on the point of receiving marching orders. The day of departure for the front found him making a last visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and when he returned to the barracks it was to find that his regiment had disappeared! He bravely reported to a superior officer who first thought the late-comer a deserter but soon changed his mind and sent John packing in search of his companions in arms. A stranger he met on the road offered to help find the regiment; all the oaf could do, however, was to lead the lost one to Noes and land him amid a crowd of deserters. Cut off from communication with his family, John did not know just what to do. A glimmer of light came when the

## *Saint John Vianney and the Nineteenth Century*

mayor of the town prevailed upon him to remain there and serve as a teacher under an assumed name. After a year's stay, the part-time teacher managed to get in touch with his father who angrily regarded him as a deserter. But the whole difficulty was composed when John's brother offered to serve in his stead. By this strange turn of events he missed taking part in the Spanish War and, as Providence would have it, returned to his studies in Ecully.

### *Dictators Do Not Tolerate*

During John's school days Napoleon, flushed with victory, scandalized all Europe because of his treatment of the Head of Christendom. All a person need do, to grasp the base perfidy of the Corsican, is to review the years 1801-1812. The army, he boldly declared, wanted no religion, and as for himself — why, dictators allow no authority or office, no matter how sacred, to run counter to their plans. The concordat he concluded with Pope Pius VII proclaimed that the Catholic religion, being the faith of the majority, should enjoy the protection of the government. But the Napoleonic nigger in the woodpile broke into the open when in 1802 certain organic laws of the Church of France, smelling of Gallicanism, were officially published. No papal decree could be issued without the *placet* of the State, monastic orders were abolished, and all teachers in the seminaries obliged to subscribe to the Declaration of French Clergy. Pius VII, of course, moved into the open to oppose all these obnoxious measures, and when he journeyed to Paris for the coronation of Napoleon, fresh insults were heaped upon him by the ill-mannered conqueror. That was not enough. A few years later, 1808, the imperial ruffian, angrier at the Pope than at any of his enemies, again tried his old tricks. With the calm temper of a Mohammedan he urged the Pope to

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

appoint a Patriarch of France, to abolish the rule of clerical celibacy, and to join in the league against England. All of which Pius VII firmly refused to do, and as a penalty his papal states were annexed to the French Empire. The Emperor, ready to go to any length, piled one trial after another upon his helpless prisoner in the Vatican who was wellnigh driven insane. And when Pius VII excommunicated Napoleon, the tyrant carried him off a prisoner, first to Savona, then into France. Now that the feeble old pontiff was his captive, Napoleon laughed the Church's condemnation to scorn. "Will the word of that old man," he snorted, "make their weapons drop from my soldiers' hands?" Well, Moscow with the aid of General Winter gave him the answer. The Grand Army he had deemed invincible met with defeat in the Russian expedition. On their retreat through the heavy blizzards, the rifles fell from frozen hands into the snow-drifts, and thousands of them perished through cold, famine, and disease.

Yes, the Little Corporal, genius though he was, had received a deep, vital blow to all his plans. But the dictator was not yet through; always a dangerous dreamer, he never knew when he was beaten. Even after defeat at Moscow, he was resolved to continue and intensify his efforts. No thought entered his mind of the great body of plain men anxious to live their own lives and face their duties. Nothing would do but that he must strike back; in chaotic and terrorized Europe he would inflict new pile-driven blows against the enemy. Had not Marengo given him power to uphold and reinforce France? At Austerlitz he had ridden roughshod over European opposition. And at Leipzig he had pulled through, though all had not gone too well. Let the Russian defeat be forgotten, France was still all-powerful and he might well take cheer. Let him but replenish his armies and

## *Saint John Vianney and the Nineteenth Century*

he would hit back harder than ever. Hit back until the enemy's power had been utterly destroyed. He would divide the nations which were bent on his destruction as a military power. How could his judgment be deceived? Such must have been Napoleon's martial dreams after the Russian failure. But like every thwarted dictator he must have his scapegoat, and when in 1812 he returned to Paris, he made it his business to treat Pius VII contumeliously, making the feeble old man a prisoner at Fontainebleau. All told, Napoleon behaved like a brigand chief in his treatment of the Vicar of Christ, and he learned too late that the public outrage was both a blunder and a crime.

### *Far From Home*

Could it have been just a coincidence of dates or was it the working of Divine Providence which rules the nations? The year of Napoleon's defeat by the Russians was the year John Vianney entered the Lesser Seminary at Verrières. Let no one think that the going was easy for one with such limited schooling. His first attempt met with failure, but three months later he passed by the skin of his teeth. Once within the hallowed walls, John's enlarged vision showed him the impotence of earthly greatness, the emptiness of merely human knowledge. Of a surety he had learned even then, with St. Paul, the vanity of worldly wisdom as contrasted with the mysterious graces given by God. The shy, unworldly seminarian had no showy intellectual qualities, his was not an examination mind, but his teachers saw that he possessed something infinitely more important. That thing was a long-tried, deep-grown spiritual experience. The hidden qualities of the newcomer remained quite unseen whereas his deficiencies in science were under class-room display, as in any school. And naturally, too, this grown

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

man from an obscure village presented a strange contrast to many of his younger confrères. There were high-brows, smart Alecs who laughed their heads off at John Vianney's dullness — he had to study philosophy in French instead of Latin — a thing which gave him good grounds for humility and patience. But there were others, kindred souls, fain to admire his piety, modesty and obedience; they saw his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, glimpsed his faith, love and self-denial, and marked him for what he was — a model seminarian.

In the month of July, 1813, John began his study of theology at home under the direction of M. Balley. Two years later this earnest preceptor decided to let him, now near thirty, take an examination for the Greater Seminary at Lyons. But John lost his head the moment the professors began to put their questions; his self-possession disappeared out the window, and he found himself rejected. The examiners regarded the gawkish applicant as an ignoramus, being unable, of course, to grasp the inner worth, the fine integrity of the man who stood before them. Dismissed as a failure, John did not know what to do, but his loyal teacher, Balley, knew, and made up his mind to stick by his man to the last ditch. By dint of argument and persuasion, after answering all the ifs, ands, and wherefores of the Seminary staff, he succeeded in having the candidate given another trial. John was re-examined at the rectory and the Superior of the Seminary agreed to give him a chance to prove himself. In the try-out he more than made good — not by any startling scholarship, but by the steady, exemplary spiritual life he exhibited to angels and men. The directors, however, still had their doubts about letting him go on for ordination. They therefore placed the matter before Abbé Courbon, the Vicar General. He reflected a moment before putting a few

## *Saint John Vianney and the Nineteenth Century*

vital questions. "Is this young Vianney pious? Does he say his rosary well? Has he devotion to the Blessed Virgin?" The reply came straightway, "He is a model of piety!" "Well then," decided Abbé Courbon, "I accept him; divine grace will do the rest." So it came to pass that John Vianney prepared for ordination and even then those inner traits began to blossom to a sacerdotal perfection.

### *The New Curate*

The newly-ordained, homeward bound in 1815, had to take roads which swarmed with Austrian troops. They were drunk with victory, and brandished their swords in his face, even threatened to shoot the scraggy Frenchman. But he managed to reach Ecully in safety, and once there the Curé Balley asked for him as an assistant. John spent his first priestly years under the eyes of this ever-loyal guide and friend. He set to work preaching, hearing confessions, aiding the pastor, visiting the sick. Seldom did two priests become more united in mind, heart and will; the assistant loved and esteemed the curé who in turn owned to the deepest respect for the young priest. After the death of M. Balley in 1817, John Vianney was appointed to the parish of Ars which had just lost its curé. "Go, my friend," said M. Courbon; "there is not much love of God in that parish; you will enkindle it." The Vicar General was right when he declared there was not much love of God in the village of Ars on the Saône. Its population was agricultural: shrewd, worldly farmers and villagers steeped in sin, hard-hitting and bitter. They had little use for any priest, and there must have been many a laugh over the appearance of John Vianney. For never had they seen his like, never anything resembling this newcomer. Pale, angular, frail in body, timid of mind, the man appeared to be afraid of his own shadow. But wait — they had not

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

yet seen the penetration of his glance, nor could they imagine what mighty power that frail body housed.

One of the first resolves of the new curé was to spend his days and nights in begging God to touch the hearts of these people and shed abundant mercy over his new parish. Ars had fallen into deep spiritual destitution. "Virtue was but little known and hardly practiced at all. Nearly everyone had forsaken the right path. The young had not an idea beyond pleasure and amusement. Every Sunday, or oftener, they all assembled in the square near the Church or at the village cabarets, according to the season, there to give themselves up to dancing and every sort of diversion." But the people after a while began to stir and rub their heavy eyes. They had observed earlier that the new curé came among them "without scrip or staff, bread or money." Wide-awake now they saw that he almost lived in church when not among the poor and sick. Then out of sheer curiosity some of them began going to church where they actually listened to simple, love-happy sermons which they had never heard before. The anti-clericals in the parish remained away, having long since lost the habit of attending religious service. "What to do with the new curé?" they must at first have asked themselves. Just let the half-starved fellow alone, death would soon take him away. They did not bother him, and the curé spent hour after hour alone in the sacristy, composing the sermons of Sunday, then delivered them to a few good folk. The two arms of his power, it will be seen, were prayer and preaching. These he employed without cease; and with feet shod with the gospel of peace he proceeded strongly and sweetly to work the greatest miracle of that day. He began a fast that was to last forty years, all in atonement for the sins, offences and negligences of his own people. By degrees the hard-bitten farmers of the district came to know John Vianney

## *Saint John Vianney and the Nineteenth Century*

who every day and all the day did nothing but heal and bless and pray, while he breathed peace over their broken lives.

### *Two Lives*

The years 1815-1818 saw John Vianney a young priest. His native France "was invaded from all sides at once by numerous armies composed on the whole not of mercenaries but of entire peoples animated by the spirit of hatred and vengeance. For twenty years they had seen their own territories occupied and ravaged by French armies; they had been forced to pay all sorts of levies; their governments had been insulted and treated with utter scorn. . . ." <sup>1</sup> But what had become of Napoleon? Briefly, this. After the Battle of Leipsic, which avenged Papal Rome, the Allies marched on to Paris. And when the defeated Corsican was on his way to Elba, Pius VII, after five years of exile, returned to Rome to the echoes of a united Europe. Now he could attempt once again to preserve freedom and destroy injustice. The Church commemorates his deliverance in her Liturgy for May 24th when the Feast of Our Lady, Help of Christians is observed. But the end for Napoleon was not yet. He tried to stage another come-back. "*Tête d'armée*" was always his vaunt; they are said to have been his dying words! One day in 1815, Louis XVIII, the restored monarch in the Tuileries, received a sinister telegram which he read with knitted brows. "Napoleon Bonaparte," he exclaimed, "has disembarked on the coast of Provence." That meant only one thing — war! The proud lonely spirit, once more on the loose, had emerged from Elba, war-bent and eager to restore his shattered hegemony. His old legions recruited on the way, the Corsican entered Paris while the Bourbon swiftly withdrew from the scene. Far from battering down the foe, however, he met

<sup>1</sup> Talleyrand, *Memoirs*

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

final defeat at Waterloo where his doughty veterans were cut to pieces. His great boast had been that no man would ever hear it said, "The Guard is breaking!" But the Guard broke that day, and shortly afterwards their indomitable commander was on his way to bitter exile in the remote God-forsaken island of St. Helena.

What a bloody mess the Corsican dictator made of Europe! Even granting that he had organized trade, industry and education, even allowing that he had imposed the Code Napoleon on a decrepit continent, none the less it is as clear as print that, like every dictator, he had succeeded in bringing human affairs to the brink of desolation. Ars at this very time showed an accurate cross-section of Europe: the little village localized the widespread threat in time and space. Its curé, however, got to work like a good shepherd, every one of his sheep dear to his heart. At first he was left alone with God — in prayer and sacrifice, then after a time the crazy sheep of the flock paused in their wanderings to observe. . . . The innocent lambs were the first to approach the newcomer, stealing into the church of Ars; a sure sign that the tough-skinned bell-wethers could not be far off. The elders, too, would come after a while, led by little children, so M. Vianney prayed and prayed. By the providence of God, a friend in need put in an appearance on the dismal scene. At the castle of Ars dwelt a wealthy woman, the daughter of an officer in Napoleon's famous Guard. She was a great lady of the *ancien régime*, witty, gracious, highly-endowed as befitted the daughter of a count. But unlike most of her class, Mademoiselle proved a pious loyal daughter of the Church and a pattern of Christian virtue. Quietly she wrought hidden charities among the poor of Ars, making the beds of the sick, mending their clothes, providing their food. And she was the first in that love-famished village to glimpse the true greatness of the

## *Saint John Vianney and the Nineteenth Century*

apostle. "I have never known such a holy priest as our new curé," she wrote. "He never leaves the Church; at the altar he is a seraph, in the pulpit he is filled with the Spirit of God." When she came to visit the Blessed Sacrament in the little abandoned church she found the curé there and the two, silent in prayer before the Most Holy, formed the beginnings of the Eucharistic life of Ars. Not long afterwards a plowman joined them, then the little knot of adorers grew, and a Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament was the result. Now they began to gather daily for adoration while every evening more members stole into the church which took on the appearance of a public service. "Our curé," people began to say, "does all he tells us to do; he practices what he preaches; we have never known him to take part in any diversion; his only pleasure is to pray to the good God; we should follow his counsels."

### *Near the Dust*

The first quarter-century (1818-1844) of the curé of Ars' labors witnessed difficult days for the Church. Anti-clericals abounded all over Europe. A fever of class-hatred had followed on the changes and perplexities mankind suffered. And in every part of Europe where Napoleon's influence prevailed, the civil authority was regarded as supreme, the rights of the papacy curtailed, and monastic foundations demolished. At the Council of Vienna (1814-1815) the rulers of Europe simply refused to work together for good with the Vicar of Christ. Since each state was empowered to regulate its own church affairs: some, like Sardinia, Naples and Bavaria, came to agreement with Rome, others — Prussia and many of the three hundred states in Germany — stoutly resisted the Church's rights. After a concordat between the Bourbons and the Vatican in 1817 was rejected by the French Parlia-

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

ment, Napoleon's old unjust settlement generally continued in force. The restoration did not secure a permanent government either. Charles I (1824-1830) and Louis-Philippe (1830-1848) found themselves ousted by revolution. The thirties brought nothing but political bitterness to the powers, grief and sorrow to the Popes. Unfaith grew day by day until great champions like Montalambert had to fight for freedom of education, winning in 1833 the right to open elementary schools. At the same time Demaistre defended the spiritual authority of the Popes, Lamennais fought for freedom of worship, liberty of the press, and the right of suffrage. None could miss seeing the radical change brought about by the 1830 revolution which crushed the clerical party and robbed the Jesuits of their newly won power. One of the severest blows to religious education was the treatment of teaching orders by the various European governments, incited by Freemasons and other subversive agencies. The Jesuits were expelled from Portugal in 1834, and three years later from France. A plot was being hatched to unify Italy under the leadership of the House of Savoy and absorb the papal kingdom by hook or crook. Indeed, in every nation of Europe there was overreaching, while Asia and Africa lay like dead oxen waiting to be taken apart by greedy spoilers.

An age of materialism had set in by mid-century. All that true religion stood for was widely ignored in the welter of class-hatred, suspicion and excitement. "Those who are guided by the Holy Spirit," said the curé of Ars, "see things. That is why so many ignorant people know more than the wise." But sad to say, the old faith of Europe, the creed of men who knew that God was in Christ reconciling the world to justice and peace — that, alas, had been cast to the four winds. There was no room for God in the teachings of science, government, economics, sociology. An Arctic winter of

### *Saint John Vianney and the Nineteenth Century*

unfaith chilled men's hearts, dulled their minds, shrivelled their morals. The agnostic scoffed at the Church; the atheist denied God and His Christ; the materialist saw naught in life save self. This stark infidelity was the great and deadly sin of the second half of the nineteenth century, a sin which would reap the whirlwind of war, revolution after revolution, and bring up with a World War before the next century was two decades old. But to return — there were all too many statesmen in Europe sworn to the policy of "enlightened selfishness." They used the wiles of crooked diplomacy, turned the godless science of their day to evil, one may say, to diabolical use. Honest or right conduct did not occur to them; the system they followed was inherently vicious, and so, destructive of world peace. The thing to note here is the unjust power — might is right — that lay behind their every effort. In Italy, freemasonry had a large hand in the uprisings, and Mazzini became the head of a group of republican patriots who plotted to overthrow the papacy.

### *Darkness and Light*

More than half-way through the century, kings began to see the need of upholding the throne and the altar. A concordat with the Holy See was drawn up in Austria. Three of the four nations that conquered the Corsican — Russia, England and Prussia — wisely took the side of the papacy, at least for the time being. The Holy Alliance aimed to establish both throne and altar, pledging itself to promote justice and religion. So far, so good. It was, however, too late in the day; the swift counter-current had set in still more violently to threaten both altar and throne. The menace of Socialism, embodied in the Communist Manifesto of 1848, made its way steadily underground. And the rank

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

materialism that had long infected men's souls equally effected policies, the wheels of state swinging again towards absolutism. Rulers bent on power politics paid no heed to "the ever more insistent cries of of the common people, who asked for nothing better in life than peace, bread and work." Pius IX (1846-1878) ascended the Chair of Peter at forty-four, and at once ran into the storm. The European plotters were everywhere intent on stirring up strife — and more strife. In Austria there was revolt and gunfire, while the King of Sardinia aided Milanese and Venetian mobs to secure a popular constitution. Then the inciters, blinding the mobs with hatred and catch words, got to work on the papal states. Their wave of hate carried the day. They assassinated the Prime Minister, Count Rossi, shot the Papal Secretary and forced Pius IX to flee his city. The tables were turned, however, when the army of Garibaldi fought the French troops who had come to the aid of the Church. The revolutionist met with defeat, and Mazzini, his co-conspirator, retreated to Switzerland. The Pope, back from exile, found much to do in working for a just and enduring peace.

When Pius IX was doing his utmost to forestall the outbreak of war and recall the nations to peace, the curé of Ars continued his miraculous pastorate in that out-of-the-way village. One by one the local abuses were met and reformed, the scandals abolished. The people of Ars had long set light store by the Lord's Day, so their curé labored for the sanctification of the Sunday. "Man," he told them, "is not merely a beast of burden, he is also a spirit created in the image of God. He has not only material wants and gross appetites, but he has also spiritual wants and appetites of the heart; he lives not only by bread, he lives by faith, prayer, love and adoration." These solid truths the curé implanted in the village mind, while he took a firm stand against the cabarets

## *Saint John Vianney and the Nineteenth Century*

and dance-halls until these hell-holes finally disappeared from the scene. There was bitter opposition, yet he kept his wits and soon discomfited the evil-doers. It was the curé's invariable custom to resort to prayer and penance whenever he wished to obtain from the Almighty favors for his flock. But it was in the confessional that he got to the heart of the problem; outside, he was firm, long-visioned, and insistent. Near to his heart were the poor neglected children of the district for whom he founded La Providence. This asylum quickly became a home of love, where the curé visited and taught the simple Catechism. The fame of the little school spread, its methods were copied, and the curé's instructions, now given daily in the Church, drew hundreds of visitors to the scene. His great work, however, could not go on without opposition which took the form of violent persecution by the devil. His rectory was attacked at night — "blows on doors, singing in the chimney, howls of wild beasts, noises of every description." All these forces of evil presently became known to the villagers who witnessed with their own eyes the strange demoniac doings, and often fled for their very lives, while the curé accepted the combat in a most matter-of-fact way. But the persecuting powers of Satan found allies in men, and the curé met with odiously cruel treatment from his own. One day he received a letter in which he read the following: "Monsieur le Curé, when a man knows as little theology as you, he ought never to enter a confessional. . . ." There were neighboring pastors who forbade their flocks to go to Ars for confession or to make a pilgrimage. They scorned his miracles as bogus, and branded the curé as a dreamer, a parvenu, and a mischief-maker. They threatened him with disgrace and censure, going so far as to have him summoned before his ecclesiastical superiors to answer to charges. Yes, even while the states of Europe were opposing the Church

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

stupid priests around Ars tried their worst to disarm the saint in their very midst. No matter. That, the curé of Ars told himself, was only what Christ had prophesied, "The enemies of a man are those of his own household."

### *The Good Pastor*

All this time the holy pastor labored unsparingly among his flock until year by year they gradually became exemplary Catholics. His was beyond doubt the victory of prayer and patience. With courageous eyes he had looked human folly in the face, and with more courageous heart aided by grace, had instilled faith in his little flock. The Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament counted nearly the whole congregation. New chapels were built in the outlying regions, and La Providence so grew that it could not house all the poor applicants. Now it was that multitudes began to flock to Ars; it looked as if France, aware of the plight she had herself prepared, turned instinctively to this holy place. Who, you may ask, called them to Ars? Not the press of the day, for it made no mention of John Vianney. As things turned out they came in ever-increasing numbers till they counted eighty thousand a year. What did they see? A humble priest, worn to a wraith, who spent most of the day at Mass, in the pulpit, and in the Confessional. So heavy were the curé's labors that in 1842 he was attacked by inflammation of the lungs and the parish despaired of his life. Still the doctor, biding the recovery of his patient, confessed no fears: "The health of the curé of Ars," he declared, "causes me no anxiety; it is cared for by Someone Else, and when I am at the end of my resources Someone Else takes the matter in hand." When the pastor recovered his frail energy, it was to face new labors, fresh trials; there still was underground resistance from the few diehards of the district. Never swayed from the path

## *Saint John Vianney and the Nineteenth Century*

of duty, he rebuked, entreated, exhorted in season and out; he attended to his growing flock as well as the outmissions, for he was one who never surrendered in his fight against the powers of evil. La Providence, so dear to his heart, became a school for girls under the direction of the Sisters of St. Joseph, and since it still held the aroma of the founder's sanctity and followed his Catechism, little wonder that it inspired the building of similar homes in France. More than that, the wonder-works of the silent priest spread far and wide, drawing thousands upon thousands in pilgrimages which were the marvel of that day. For the dominant tendency of the age, remember, was one of unfaith and gross sinfulness; it was a time when nations and men had turned their back on God and goodness.

The curé of Ars, from 1835 on, had to deny himself every relief, even his retreats, in order to minister to the crowds that flocked to Ars, pilgrimage after pilgrimage. They came from all parts of France; from England, Holland, and Germany, even from far-off America. And all day long, except when at the altar, or in the pulpit and Confessional, the curé cared for them — high and low, rich and poor; the lame, the blind, the deaf, the epileptic. But it was "in the box," as eyewitnesses reported, that most of his time was spent — from 1 to 8 A.M., and from 1 to 8 P.M. An amusing incident is related of an uppish woman who tried to rush ahead of the waiting throngs. When the tumult brought M. Vianney out of his box he had to face an indignant husband. "It is my wife who wants to make her confession," said the stranger, challengingly. "Very well," the curé replied, calm as ever, "she will come in her turn." Here the upstart lady chimed in, "I cannot wait!" "I am exceedingly sorry," said the curé, "but were you the Empress herself, you must wait your proper turn." Often when he emerged from the hot, close

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

tribunal, he was half-dead from exhaustion. "One must come to Ars," he would say with tears, "in order to know what sin is and to appreciate the harm that Adam has wrought in his unfortunate family. One knows not what to do! One can only pray and weep." And there you have the secret of the saint's power — love of souls, prayer and penance. It is scant cause for wonderment that his "cures" multiplied, the efficacy of his petition increased; for the nearer holy people come to God, the greater the power of their intercession. The blessed curé, the very antithesis of the modern world, brought peace on earth to his parish. His little flock, though poor, was wellnigh perfect — and happy! Had they not seen in his life, clear as day, the futility of money, the emptiness of human learning, the impotence of earthly honors? They were not a whit surprised when great men of France (Lacordaire, for instance, the preacher of the century) came to sit at the feet of their curé; nor were they awed at the sight of his old table piled high with letters from all parts of the earth. They easily understood the man who said, "Before I came to Ars, and saw the *good Father*, I could hardly believe what is related in the lives of the saints. Now I believe them all, because I have seen with my own eyes, and much more besides."

But the days of the holy man fast drew to a close in the terrible heat of July, 1859. His breakdown proved so complete that he could not rise from his bed, and asked to be let alone to die "with his poor flies."

"You are tired, Monsieur le Curé."

"Yes, I think it is my *poor end*."

"I'll go and get help."

"No, don't disturb anyone; it's not worth while."

At two o'clock in the morning of August 4, 1859, John Vianney passed peacefully away without agony or struggle,

## *Saint John Vianney and the Nineteenth Century*

and Ars knew it had lost the perfect parish priest, a man of whom Pope Pius X could say, "This priest, poor, humble and unlearned in the eyes of the world, has become the marvel of the entire human race."

### *Force or Freedom*

After the curé of Ars' going, the great question was whether Europe would seek the peace of God, or continue resorting to the sword of greed. The attempted hegemony of Napoleon had been crushed, it is clear, only to bring an illusory peace and pave the way for the designs of other war-wolves. Added to that peril, the deadly sin of disbelief was daily undermining the social structure and causing a world-wide fever. The evil fruits of the Congress of Vienna began to appear in the rapidly growing unrest and rivalry of nations. Nor would the strong, unscrupulous statesmen of the day, such as Cavour and Bismarck, do anything to repair that evil. The balance of power now replaced any possible balance of peace, while misery lay in store for the common people, deprived of their basic liberties. A series of fresh wars seemed to be imminent. Two great Popes saw the conflict ahead and played a big role in this half-century. Pius IX (1846-1878) and Leo XIII (1878-1903) were men who sought peace and pursued it; men with the minds of seers. The former, faced with the threat of seemingly endless persecution, manfully stood his ground year after year. Long before mid-century he had suffered at the hands of the plotters—the House of Savoy chock-a-block with the revolutionists. Yet, by a providence of Heaven, while Catholic Italy was still at pains to rob the Holy See, the hierarchy was established in Holland, in 1583, and the next year Pius defined the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. In 1854, after the Anglo-Russian mess in the Crimea, he signed a concordat with Austria. In the mean-

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

time Bismarck, who represented Prussia in the German diet, decided he would make short work of Austria. His ultimate aim was to shackle the Catholic power and unite all Germans in an empire under the aegis of Prussia. A quarrel was soon started and in 1866 the Austrians entered the ambush of Prussian treachery. All over Italy plot and counter-plot continued, with the aim of securing a united kingdom. There were revolts in Poland (1863) and in Ireland (1866) against the unbearable injustice of mighty powers. As tyrannical and despotic governments carried on, Europe was moving rapidly towards self-destruction.

The crisis came in 1870. That year the Italians seized Rome, while the Prussians defeated Austria at Sedan. King Victor Emmanuel II of the new Kingdom of Italy sought in vain to placate Pius IX who chose to remain a protesting prisoner in the Vatican. When, earlier, the Italian army had entered Rome, Pius ordered the papal troops to put down their arms and said, "Only yesterday I received a communication from the young gentlemen of the American College, begging, I should say, demanding, permission to arm themselves and to constitute themselves the defenders of my person. . . ." In 1870 the Vatican Council, opened the year before, proclaimed the Papal Infallibility. It was the largest Ecumenical Council in the annals of the Church, and its decisions, touching upon matters of doctrine, faith and discipline, were received with joy all the world over. But no sooner had the German Empire become a reality than Bismarck launched a persecution against the Catholics. It was the Prussian's boast that, "Neither in Church or state are we on the way to Canossa." The "Falk Laws," were enacted by Bismarck's nimble agents to suppress Catholic Action, but the German Catholics slugged it out in an effective manner, and the so-called Kulturkampf resulted in the sound defeat of the

### *Saint John Vianney and the Nineteenth Century*

Prussian dictator. Pius IX was succeeded by the aged but brilliant Vincenzo Pecci who, as Leo XIII, displayed magnificent initiative and independence. This great Pope, often called the Socialist Pontiff, fostered social justice, warned the crowned heads of Europe of the dangers ahead, and proved to be a true prophet, the keenest observer and interpreter of the main currents of his era. But the papal warnings went unheeded, though the rulers, recognizing Leo's genius and uncanny foresight treated him with unwonted respect. The old power politics, blind and greedy as ever, were still at work, undermining the peace of Europe. They had isolated the Capital of the Ages, swept away the counsels of the wisest men of the time and despised the rights of labor along with the virtue of justice. Not long now, and the new century would see the wolves of hatred unleashed first in World War I, then in a Global War, which would shake the very foundations of civilization.



SAINTS AND MARTYRS IN THE AMERICAS

# Saint Rose of Lima

FLOWER OF THE NEW WORLD

## EARLY SOUTH AMERICAN SCENE

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Cabral blown off course to Brazil	1500
Balboa hears of the Inca Empire	1511
Balboa discovers the Pacific	1513
First Settlement in Venezuela	1520
Magellan discovers the Straits	1520
Cortez lands at Vera Cruz	1521
Pizarro's first attempt to reach Peru	1524
Franciscan Friars in Mexico	1524
Sebastian Cabot discovers Paraguay	1525
Pizzaro invades Peru	1531
Conquest of Peru	1533-1534
Chili invaded by Spaniards	1535
Uprising of the Inca Manco	1535
Franciscans preach Christianity in Paraguay	1536
Diocese of Cuzco erected	1536
Civil wars among the conquerors	1538
Bolivia under the viceroyalty of Lima	1540
Bishop Valverde assassinated	1541
Pizarro assassinated	1541
Growth of Church in Paraguay	1542
Archdiocese of Lima established	1543
Lima the Capital of Peru	1544
Diocese of Paraguay created	1547
Argentine colonized by Spain	1550
San Marcos, first University in New World	1551
Extraordinary missionary activities	1560
Jesuits enter Peru	1568
Bl. Martin Porres born in Lima	1569
Holy Office established in Peru	1570
First Printing Press in New World	1577
Mission school at Lake Titicaca (Juli)	1577
Philip II assigns Turibio, Archbishop of Lima	1580
Turibio arrives in Lima	1581
Birth of Rose of Lima	1586
Francis Solanus journeys to the Chaco	1588
Rose receives Confirmation	1597
Rose retires to a little grotto	1598
Journeys of St. Turibio	1598
Rose plans to enter the Dominican Order	1599

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## SAINT ROSE OF LIMA

### *The New World*

A nautical chart, dated 1474 and drawn by the geographer Toscanelli, had deservedly high place in the discovery of America. By its close study Columbus, sure that the earth was a ball, was further convinced that Cathay, the land of mystery, lay only twenty-five hundred miles beyond the Canaries. Did not the prophets and the philosophers also point the direction to such a fabulous land? Oh, the glory of such a successful adventure through the Sea of Darkness, and the rewards that awaited such map-reading! But years passed before the Genoese mariner was able to convince Ferdinand and Isabella that their war-weary nation would outrun Portugal; then with Spanish coffers overflowing, the Holy Land could be reclaimed, heathens converted and slaves by the thousands secured. At long last, on August 3, 1492, Columbus, in command of three caravels, departed from Palos into the weird unknown. He sailed west from the Canaries and, after crossing the Atlantic in its widest part, made the Bahamas, on October twelfth. An Irishman from Galway, Harris by name, and an Englishman, Arthur Laws, journeyed with the great Italian, another voyager was the father of the first priest to be ordained in the New World. This zealous Dominican, Bartholomew Las Casas, who came to Hispaniola with Ovando in 1502 was destined for a long and eventful career far away from his native Seville. Twelve times he crossed the Atlantic and covered every then known region of America and the islands. All his priestly life he struggled to rescue the natives from the slavery imposed by the Spanish soldiers. It was the old, old story of

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the cross versus the sword, charity against cruelty — a contest that has continued ever since. Las Casas' battle cry was, "He that taketh away his neighbor's living slayeth him; and he that defraudeth the laborer of his hire is a blood-shedder." The discovery of America poured a torrent of wealth into Europe to feed the greed and stir the rivalry of the nations, but the one who opened the way, the great admiral of middle age with fair, ruddy face and white hair, died in poverty and disgrace, without ever knowing what a world-changing thing he had done.

Other fearless navigators sailed over the uncharted ocean in the wake of Columbus' caravels. The Italian seamen as early as 1400 used charts, compass and timepiece; they were easily the best navigators in Europe. By the year 1497, Amerigo Vespucci reached the solid mass and gave the continent its name; and the Cabots, Italian mariners, discovered the northern coast. Three years later Cortereal explored Laborador, Cabral, blown off his course, drifted to far-off Brazil, and Magellan reached the straits which bear his name. Thus it was that the seaman's pincers spanned the eastern coasts of two Americas. But it remained for Cortez, the most educated and reckless of the conquistadors, to begin the actual conquest of the New World. A year after Magellan's adventure Cortez braved the unknown sea, landed at Vera Cruz, and planned to conquer Mexico. His Spanish soldiers of fortune, scuttling their ships, marched boldly inland and took Montezuma's great city, enriching Emperor Charles V with a region vaster than all his European dominions. In one of Cortez's ships was a foolhardy stow-away, named Balboa, who was to be the discoverer of the Pacific; an even more adventurous swashbuckler was Cortez' lieutenant Pizarro, the actual invader of South America. News had come to Balboa in Darien that down continent a

## *Saint Rose of Lima*

king ruled over the mountains and the sea. The country to the south, it was said, was full of gold and precious stones, with four-footed beasts of burden to boot. Days passed, days of patient waiting. While the eyes of the Spaniards focussed in Central America, Pizarro, with one hundred sixty armed men, set out for the distant Andes there to garner wealth and establish power in the high lands. After two unsuccessful attempts, he embarked at Panama in 1531 with three Dominicans aboard and reached the Empire of the Incas. Black treachery and brutal energy were the blood-stained weapons of the cruellest conquistador of them all. The Inca foully deceived and his subjects divided, the struggles of the brave aborigines only made it clearer that there was no escape for them. So it fell out that the formidable Pizarro unwittingly "went West" hundreds of years before the idea occurred to the English in the New World.

## *Land of the Incas*

Peru, named after "Beru," an Indian tribe, was the country where the Andean range, running southeast to northwest, follows the curve of the coast. Gold had lured Pizarro to its strange shores, gold and the hope of ruling like a steel-clad monarch, but what was his surprise to find there highly civilized Indians with an advanced culture. They worshipped the Sun God, displayed a most elaborate ritual, and maintained impressive ceremonies at animal sacrifice. Their ruler, the Inca, was a war-chief, elected by the council to carry out its decisions, who by that time held sway over more than half of South America; the Peruvian tribes were mainly scattered over the coast, in the jungles, and among the Cordilleras. Adept at agriculture, builders of great renown, they had their own social and political institutions. They were brave warriors, too, but Pizarro and his treasure-mad

### *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

ruffians treated them so bitterly that two years sufficed for complete conquest. Upon taking Cuzco, the capital of the vast Empire, Pizarro established a government and proceeded to dole out grants of land and houses; four years later a Dominican monastery rose on the site of the Inca temple of the sun. But there were flare-backs from the natives, Indians of fine physique and quick intelligence. Add to that uprisings on the part of claimants to the Inca's crown and civil war among the conquerors themselves. Amid this near chaos, the missionaries were burdened with the almost insuperable task of winning over the still warlike vanquished. Yet by patience and heroic sacrifice they succeeded, as we shall see, in planting the faith in Peru.

The Indians in the bush soon came to regard the padres in a far different light from the cruel soldiery. Then with the coming of Father Pedro de Gasca in 1546 the poor oppressed found a stout champion who dared to take sides with them against his own people. The Dominicans led the way; they were followed by their comrades-in-Christ, Franciscans, Augustinians and Jesuits. These men of God left their homes in Europe for a far-off, fabulous land, to play their part in human affairs and win souls to the true way of life. They came armed only with hope and zeal, they saw with eyes of faith, and they conquered by charity. It is not too much to say that they carried the full weight of their burden, expecting little help from King or council. As these fearless heralds of the faith entered jungles, sailed dark rivers, and climbed the high lands, one tribe after another were won over by love and devotion to embrace the truth and forget the bitter past. Who can doubt that these padres typify, more than most, "democracy at work with its 'sleeves rolled up'"; for democracy is indeed an illusion, is nothing without neighbor love. That they did their job well no

### *Saint Rose of Lima*

man can doubt; still more, they handed on to future generations hope and confidence, not bitter disappointment. Instead of wiping out the native, they won him over to the Church of the Ages. Many of these first pioneers lived to see new dioceses established, while in the cities of Cuzco and Lima there rose, as if by the magic of love, many churches, monasteries, convents and schools. The land of the Inca gave promise of entering an era of peace and prosperity, not unmixed however with sporadic revolts and warfare.

### *The First American Crusade*

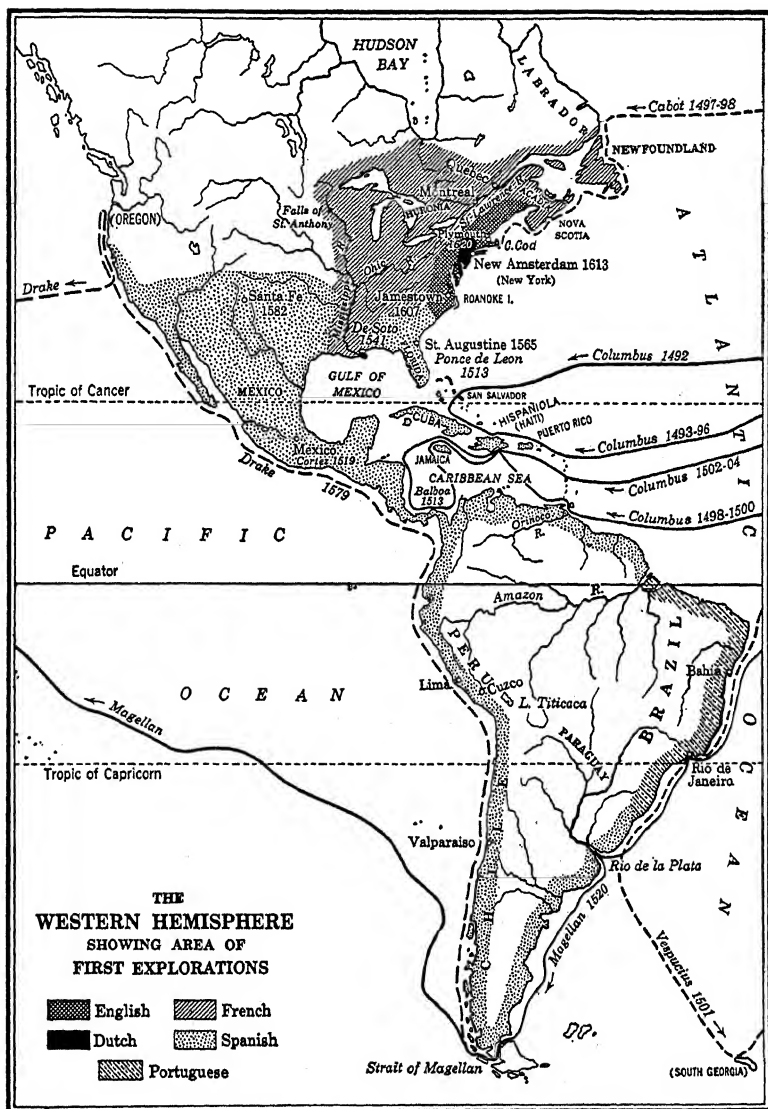
The military conquest of Peru took only a short time, 1533-1534, but the spiritual combat would cover centuries. There were martyrs and saints those days, a fact which explains the early spread of the faith. Frey Valverde, first bishop of Cuzco, a tireless worker among the sick and injured, was murdered by Puna Indians in 1541; Saint Turibio, second bishop of Lima died in 1606, worn out by the journeys and hardships of his apostolate. A whole world of work for Christ still awaited the padres in the dark jungle, along banks of deep rivers, on the Cordilleras. They did not know whether the natives might greet them peaceably or do them to death with a poisoned arrow. At the outset, the Indians held all Spaniards suspect; no wonder, having felt the searing imprint of the conquistador, and the bitterness of his treachery. The coastal tribes soon had opportunity enough to appreciate at close quarters the true spirit of the cassocked newcomers. They quickly saw that the padres' only arms were love and zeal; the eyes they looked into told of hope, good humor and kindness; still more the acts, the loving-kindness they received was good, exceedingly good! These priests were men of God who had come "to preach good tidings, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives,"

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

and very soon it was realized that the faith they held could furnish "the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." A year after the invasion, Cuzco the old Inca capital, had a bishop; the place almost overnight possessed churches, convents, schools; and a peaceful population went about their business.

The coastal cities, however, were but the first step in the Crusade for Christ. "Go and teach all," was the divine charge. All nations, all tribes, all tongues! Of old, St. Peter left Jerusalem, trod the imperial roads and entered Rome, the center of pagan power; so would the missionaries proceed in the New World — even to the cradle of the Incas. Padres and lay brothers began to penetrate the jungles, sail the rivers, climb ancient tribal paths to the Andes. The poisoned swamps held no terror for these heralds of the Gospel, icy cold did not deter them, nor pinching upland winds chill their zeal. They must, at all costs, offset the ghastly impact of the conquistador; their lives gladly given, they would make up for the cruelties and injustices inflicted on the vanquished.

St. Francis Solano knifed his way through dense jungles; by slow stages the hardy Franciscan journeyed in 1588 from Peru to the Paraguayan Chaco preaching to the tribes in their own dialect. What grotesque surprises awaited him when he glimpsed the frenzied Indians at their religious ceremonies! The natives in enormous headdress danced with pagan fervor to the music of pipe and drum. Blue and yellow feathers of the macaw waved defiantly over hideous faces, aflame as much from the fire of liquor as from their scarlet paint. It was clearly the task of all missionaries to civilize suchlike before they could Christianize. So, while the sons of St. Augustine labored to salvage good for all on the hot coastal plains and in the foothills, the sons of St. Ignatius climbed



## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

forbidding trails to towering heights, following what often seemed a forlorn hope to reach the mountain tribes. They beheld for the first time the proud-stepping llama of the Andes, a docile graceful animal which served the highland Indian not only as his beast of burden, but his sole source of meat, milk and clothing. More wonderful still, they found the ruins of Inca and pre-Inca periods, happened upon rare pottery, exquisite designs in earrings and beads — all in the day's work for God. The children of the Sun grew to love the black robes; seeing is believing, and many embraced the faith. In a wide valley of the Andes nestled the island-studded lake, Titicaca, cradle of Incan civilization, the bulwark of an ancient tyranny. It lay 12,500 feet above the sea level; and there at Juli the Jesuits opened a training school for missionaries, and set up the first printing press in the New World. On the western side of the lake lay Puno, 13,000 feet high, the city where Manco Capac, founder of the Peruvian dynasty, made his reputed miraculous appearance. Into such weird unholy places the missionaries proceeded, braving a thousand dangers in their effort to win souls. A great American crusade, indeed, which would make up in numbers for the losses the Church incurred in the sixteenth century.

### *City by the Sea*

One of the oldest cities in the New World is Lima, the beautiful. Built on the right bank of the River Rimac, six hundred feet above the hot, unhealthful strand, it looks out to Callao harbor nine miles away. It was Pizarro himself who, after the conquest, chose the place beyond the swamps and laid the first stone of the cathedral in the wide plaza. The Inca capital, Cuzco, stood too far inland to suit the conquistador who wanted a city near the coast, high enough to

## *Saint Rose of Lima*

be livable and easily accessible to incoming voyagers. His vision was wholly justified, for Lima became the capital city, opened in 1551 the University of San Marcos, first in the New World, and rapidly advanced as a center of social, religious and mercantile activity. On the death of its first bishop, the Dominican Loaysa, in 1575, Philip II of Spain sent an able successor who had been in turn professor of law at Salamanca and president of the Court of the Inquisition at Granada. Bishop Turibio Mogrovejo arrived in Lima in 1581 and proved an ideal choice for the place, the most needed man of the day. Firm, prudent and full of zeal for souls, he found no task too hard, no trial too heavy; under his shepherdly guidance, convents, monasteries, churches, hospices, libraries and novitiates grew apace; in fifteen years he held fourteen synods and three councils, introducing drastic reforms of crying abuses prevalent in his vast diocese. Not only were his limitless energies spent in the cathedral city; even greater was his accomplishment in the mission field.

Bishop Turibio was the sort of apostle who, once having decided what was for God's cause, defied all difficulties in doing it. The labors he undertook in behalf of the Indians appear almost incredible. To begin with, he spent desperate hours mastering the Quichua language in order to teach the natives the way of the Gospel and see for himself that they got a fair deal. Then, he dwelt calmly among them, year after year, sinking his roots with theirs, aiming to repair "the desolations of many centuries." With two secretaries he went about his work, preaching and baptizing until death caught up with him in the fevered swamps. None the less he had lived long enough to count thousands of converts to the faith; even to see Lima become the sweet garden of saints, two of whom Rose Marie, the fairest of flowers, and Martin Porres, the holy half-breed, have been raised to the altars of

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the Church. Not that Lima was a purely religious and cultural center, an altogether high-minded place. Far from it. For the city opened its gates to a motley throng drawn thither by the magnetism of gold and silver: families from the West Indies, adventurers by the shipload from Europe, vagabond sailors from the new-found seas. Added together they made a darkly mixed population, but Lima, though largely of Spanish pattern, was actually a small cross-section of the New World.

### *A Flower Blooms*

Among the early arrivals from Porto Rico was the family of Gasper de Florez and Maria del Oliva. They found a home in the fast-growing city, a low rambling structure not far from the Church of San Sebastian, and there, on April 20, 1586, Rose was born. She was baptized Isabella but folk called her Rose — so sweet and ruddy was the babe that she appeared like a tiny mystical rose. The early tender years, when she was dependent on the example and tradition of her race, showed the charming criolla<sup>1</sup> a true Spaniard to the core. At three, the venturesome little one crushed her thumb under a heavy chest lid; a surgeon was called in and she submitted without a whimper to his barbarous treatment. Other traits appeared when Rose was barely five. She had a wealth of auburn hair, which an older brother, "gone Indian," plastered with mud, much to Rose's anger, for the child was very proud of her crowning glory. Not content with his first mischief, he began to upbraid his little sister, preaching a sermon with all the heat and tempo of a friar thundering forth in the pulpit of San Sebastian. "Why," he cried, "what a fuss you make about your red hair! You little know what a frizzling girl's hairs get in hell-fire, if they are vain of them!" It is what

<sup>1</sup> A criolla is a person born in America of Spanish parents.

### *Saint Rose of Lima*

happened at that point which is significant. Rose, deeply impressed by the brimstone sermon, bewailed her vanity; still more, she got herself a razor, cut off the muddied tresses and shaved her head to the scalp. From that time on she appears to have been ignorant alike of her great beauty and charm. The mud-plastering urchin could not have been so bad a brother, since he was presently helping Rose to construct a shed in the back of their garden. They were hardly more than children, these two, yet Rose's heart held wondrous secrets unknown to her family. She wanted the bee-like place for a refuge where an industrious little maid, already deeply religious, could make sweet spiritual honey. The hut in the near jungle became a place of withdrawal, an abode of holiness. Thither the budding mystic repaired whenever it was possible, and later it served as a cell where she dwelt most of the time, leaving it only to go to Mass and visit the Blessed Sacrament. But now, having received her parents' humoring consent to sleep there, the child began to decorate her retreat. Safe from prying eyes, Rose who was home-loving by nature and exceedingly talented, would make baby-garments to clothe the statute of the Divine Infant, and spend her extra time in self-discipline, one of her secret practices being to weave a crown of thorns and place it on her head. No fear of man or beast troubled her pure unspoiled heart, for God was in her thoughts day and night. "On high on the stars' far side was the Infinité Beauty of the Trinity." And when she awoke to a lovely morning her heart would wing out, "O all ye green things of the earth, bless ye the Lord!" Birds nesting near by sang sweetly at her command; trees bowed their heads and touched the ground. In the very freshness of her time this Heaven-chosen child had made a definite choice; the worship in her sweet young soul would grow more intense with the years.

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

"Love the good and the true," said a great artist, "then you will get to love the beautiful." Rose, who now called herself Rose Marie, owing to a special vision she had of the Blessed Mother, craved only one thing — the beauty of holiness. She feared sin for what it is — the thief of the soul's peace, the sting of death. Not for nothing had she seen on Lima's streets the curse of wrongdoing with all its nauseating consequences; though her generous soul was never blind to the merits of others, she saw the furtive lurking pride that demanded excess of attention and cast aside the pure robe of modesty. Her mother was not of such a mind; and be it said, she knew little of Rose Marie's inner spiritual beauty. Maria del Oliva, with eyes only for the things that fade, attended largely to Rose Marie's face and hair, her lovely complexion and tapering fingers. The De Florez family appeared to have been a gay, human, care-free, wholly charming group, with roots deep in old Spain. One can readily understand the home problems of the young mystic, intent on becoming a saint. In vain did Maria del Oliva play a strong hand to make the humble girl bedizen herself like the young *senoritas* of Lima. Often enough, no doubt, the mother's insistence was no more than a mask concealing the family pride. Rose Marie, adequate to each challenge, found ways to circumvent the danger of every self-adornment. The roses, dutifully woven into a wreath on her head, contained thorns pressed down and piercing the skin. The gloves, soft and scented, which obedience compelled her to wear, had the fingers lined with stinging herbs. She firmly refused, however, to do up her hair in the prevailing fashion, or paint her face or wear the silk gowns they thrust upon her. Was not St. Catherine her model? Did she not secretly imitate the Italian mystic? The South American girl found deep joy in copying the penances of her heavenly friend, even to

### *Saint Rose of Lima*

the extent of fasting for days and binding a rough chain round her slender waist. Once in her hide-away she would weave a Catherine-crown of ninety-nine thorns and wear it by the hour. The mud-bricked hut was lavishly decorated with holy things; for she regarded it a mystical wedding chamber for sweet converse with Our Lord.

One day during a visit to the Church of San Sebastian, Rose Marie fell into a trance before the statue of Mary and the Child. "Rose of My Heart," said the Infant, "be thou My spouse." And Rose replied, "I am Thy handmaid, I will be Thine." From that time on, the elect girl practiced crueller penances and longer fastings; she roughened her beautiful hands with added toil, and when the family opposition became unbearable she ran to her confessor, told him of her plight and got him to make Maria del Oliva stop pestering her daughter. The self-inflicted penances continued without abatement, and one difficult day when vanity assailed her the courageous senorita, not from naive piety this time but in stern self-conquest, once more sheared off her locks. Old friends could not believe their eyes, the children ridiculed the shorn head, her parents were simply desolate. But Rose Marie deemed it unseemly that beautiful hair should adorn a head so empty as hers, and continued undismayed on her holy path. No admonitions nor punishments were strong enough to deter her from practices of self-abasement. This incident may sound strange in our day, but she prevailed on the Indian servant to jump and dance on her back, a thing to which Mariana first demurred, but then enjoyed and performed with savage gusto.

### *South American Milliner*

In 1597 Bishop Turibio confirmed Rose Marie, then aged eleven. The sheath had dropped from the rose-bud, and the

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

grace of the Holy Ghost reached the very roots, the ultimate fibres of the elect girl's soul. As she grew older, people marvelled at the *senorita* who had so little in common with the girls who painted their cheeks with rouge, their eyelids with antimony; instead of taking pains with her hair, and making much of dress she devoted herself to menial tasks. Now that she was a milliner, earning her livelihood, and supporting her family, there was little time for any nonsense. The pattern of her life, both inner and outer, remained a holy and lovely thing before God and men. All the city knew of her radiant goodness, the overflowing love she displayed for the poor, and dignified ladies of Lima went out of their way to meet the De Florez maiden whose delicate fingers could fashion such exquisite lace and embroidery. There were many embarrassments to be faced in the city by any young woman of beauty and charm, none the less Rose Marie really belonged to the company of the dauntless. A young man, Vincent de Venegas, falling in love with the gifted store-worker, sought in true South American fashion to have a meeting with the adored one. Going to the millinery department the would-be suitor slyly masked his real intent: "I would have a set of fine-frilled collars," he announced, "and no one makes them better than Rose Marie de Florez; may I have a set?" While Rose Marie was measuring the neck of the love-lorn gallant, she saw the whole truth in eyes hungrily devouring her. "You have not come here for collars," she upbraided him. "I see that clearly enough. Do not tell lies but have an eye to good conduct." Taken aback, and not knowing what to say, the young man sheepishly departed, never to return. Maria del Oliva dearly wanted a brilliant marriage for this favored daughter and many a young gallant was most willing, but mundane love was not for Rose Marie who would have none of them. Grim

## *Saint Rose of Lima*

years of tension and excitement followed, ten years of amazing patience and severe self-mastery. She encountered family opposition a-plenty, but it got nowhere with the brave young woman who had a secret vow of virginity and a burning desire to become a Dominican. With heart given over to a Divine Spouse, and eyes only for the Eternal Beauty, she found her joy and happiness in the parish church before the Most Holy. Her garden cell, too, proved a Godsend during those difficult days; the world with its poisoned precepts had no place where an ardent lover of Christ transformed all values, until she became "a thing enskied and sainted."

All this time Rose Marie was seldom free from inner trial, on the contrary the fierce tempter assailed her purity, faith and constancy. But Christ appeared to her, enriching her with grace, and empowering the young mystic in all her holy resolves. These supernal visions frightened Rose Marie, driving her at length to seek advice from different confessors. One after another, they definitely assigned physical causes — bile, lack of sleep, undernourishment. Solemnly they warned her to be on her guard lest she become prey to what they deemed dangerous delusions. Maria del Oliva, greatly worried, called in the doctor who at first prescribed pills, then bitter draughts, and finally bleedings. No use, however. Rose Marie prayed and suffered so intensely they wondered she had any strength to survive. Then a commission of doctors and divines took up the case to determine whether Senorita de Florez was mad or sane. In true Inquisition fashion they put their heads together, examined the books she read, probed into her motives, and generally made a nuisance of themselves. But they got nowhere, except to agree that Rose Marie was "very, very ill!" All but one, Don Juan de Castillo, a deeply religious man who heartily disagreed with his confrères. This capable physician had

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

won the young woman's confidence and was rewarded with a confident description of her feelings and visions; he gave it as his verdict that these came from God and there was nothing any commission could do about it. Just the same Maria del Oliva stormed and stormed, displaying her wrath in harsh treatment, but despite the fuss and fury Rose Marie was not one to lay down arms. Intent on following the way of the cross, she continued her devotions and self-denials as before and found deep abiding peace, being rewarded with visions more ravishing than ever.

### *War and Peace*

The capital city had its ups and downs and Peru itself underwent inner struggles and near calamities. Then, even as today, revolt lurked in the shadow of the Andes, the air was filled with fears and rumors, there was peril by land and sea. One day the people were thrown into a panic by the appearance of a Dutch fleet off the coast. Seeing the port of Callao in danger, and fearing for the safety of Lima, Rose Marie fled to San Sebastian. Hour after hour she stood before the altar-steps, ready to defend the Hidden Presence with her life against any insults or profanities of heretics. She did not quit the holy place until word was brought that the fleet, weighing anchor, had disappeared. With the passing of time came a change of scene when Gaspar de Florez decided to leave Lima for the mining town of Guanaca. The two-hundred-mile journey thither would have tried the heart of a conquistador. Over swamp and sand trail the family plodded along, weary unto death, pushing ahead up hill and through thick jungle where they encountered Indians with eyes hard and hating. When they arrived at Guanaca, a wet hot valley in the cordilleras, the long trek had taken its toll. Once there, Rose Marie's weakened health did not prevent

### *Saint Rose of Lima*

her from assuming the role of nurse amid the shacks and mine-pits. An angel of mercy, she went straight to work, scattering the largess of her devotion which, in all truth, was greatly in demand. For in the poverty-stricken place, heavy labor and gruelling hardship were the rule; and the folk in that harsh, sun-weary valley knew little of hope and brightness. Theirs was the cruel lot of living in subjection, humiliation and fear. Mine-owners, rapacious as ever, used slave-driving methods, while the Indians, nomadic and lazy, often refused to work. Among them all the matchless *Senorita de Florez* spent herself, giving the rest of the time to her prayers and her needle-plying. Worn out by long hours of overwork and fasting, she fell ill and the *de Florez* family despaired of her life. Indeed, it was months before *Rose Marie* was restored to health and even then all could see the ravages of fever had made a shadow of the self-sacrificing *senorita*. But sweetly and surely she stuck to her ideal, until at long last she achieved her dearest wish on earth—to live in the Dominican convent in Lima.

### *Saint Rose of Mary*

At twenty *Rose Marie* entered the Third Order of St. Dominic. The little black-and-white butterfly that had hovered so long over her, and which bore the colors of St. Dominic, saw her safe into her new monastic cell. But do not imagine for a moment it was all as easy as that. New trials accompanied her almost to the door of the convent, though her stay in the world had been in itself a long and trying noviceship. An old Spanish lady, whose son she had repelled, but who intended willy-nilly to make the lovely *senorita* her daughter-in-law, was so infuriated by defeat that she savagely slapped the face of the innocent girl. And as if that were not bad enough, *Rose Marie* had to stand fast

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

against an avalanche of family opposition and breast the flood of "ferocious authority." Maria del Oliva, still obsessed with the idea of a wealthy marriage, did everything to dissuade her daughter from her secretly avowed purpose. Once in the convent, however, Sister Rose of St. Mary could thank her beloved St. Catherine, and strive harder than ever to imitate the great mystic. No fugacious bloom was this Dominican tertiary, but a glory of her time, drenched with the stored-up sweetness of a life "hidden with Christ in God." A metal-spiked crown, covered with roses, was secretly worn on her shorn head, the old iron chain still served as a hidden girdle, and days passed without any food save a bitter salad of gall mixed with herbs. All this voluntary mortification and self-inflicted pain indicated the saint's growing hunger and thirst to share in the Passion of Our Lord. Sister Rose of St. Mary had set her mind on Christ crucified, and would never take it from Him. There is no doubt that for her, as for St. Paul, "to live was Christ and to die was a gain." This victim-impulse, it should be noted, has been a spring of sanctity in every age of the Church. No one need be surprised, therefore, to learn that for fourteen years Sister Rose of St. Mary continued her fierce penances, experiencing in the midst of them the most heavenly consolations. Our Lord revealed Himself and flooded her soul with peace and joy in marvellous ecstasies that often continued for hours.

The life of Sister Rose of St. Mary, with its harsh ascetism, was not all prayer and penance. She undoubtedly played an important part in Lima's progress towards law, order, and religion. At the convent there were visiting days which enabled her to extend a holy influence on souls outside the walls. One of her co-workers was the Dominican lay-brother, Martin Porres, whose fame had spread all over Lima. None in all that city held the affection of the poor and lowly as did

### *Saint Rose of Lima*

those wonder-workers for God. They had much in common, the beautiful nun of the de Florez family, and the black lay-brother, son of a Panamanian negress and a Spanish knight of Alcantara. Both had been baptized in San Sebastian Church; both wore the black and white habit of St. Dominic; both had reached heights of holiness. Martin was the herald of many of Sister Rose of St. Mary's charities to the poor, the bearer of love and consolation to the poverty-ridden corners of the capital city. They spiritually refreshed multitudes, their deeds of mercy brought joy into many a hovel, the power of their intercession was extraordinary. Many a vagabond was won to deathbed repentance, many a sick Indian brought back to health through the heart of St. Rose and the hand of Blessed Martin. Thus you find it throughout church history; wherever a holy man reforms or restores, there is always a woman saint somewhere in the background giving aid and encouragement. It is illuminating, too, to learn that Sister Rose of St. Mary offered all her penances and mortifications in reparation for the sins of her day, the outrages of her kinsmen conquistadors, the idolatries of her beloved Indians, and for the souls in purgatory. A true South American, the flower of her people, Rose of Lima was undoubtedly of the breed of God's heroines who, in their brief day on earth, worked to restore all things in Christ. The angelic soul, imprisoned in a wasted body, fast approached the gate of Heaven. After a long and agonizing sickness, she died, on August 24, 1617, at the age of thirty-one. Half a century passed, and in 1671, to the joy of all her countrymen and countrywomen, she was canonized. The Church of the Ages thus set a South American saint alongside her great Spanish contemporary, Teresa of Avila, and later awarded her the holy accolade, Patroness of Latin America and the Philippines.



SAINTS AND MARTYRS IN THE AMERICAS

**Saint Isaac Jogues**

SERVANT OF SAVAGES

## EARLY NORTH AMERICAN SCENE

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Mass said on banks of the St. Croix River	1604
Jamestown, Virginia, settled	1607
Birth of Jogues	1607
Quebec founded	1608
The <i>Half-Moon</i> sailed up the Hudson	1609
Champlain explores Northern New York	1609
Fort Orange, a Dutch trading post	1613
First Settlement by Dutch on Manhattan Island	1614
Lake Ontario region visited by Champlain	1615
Mayflower arrives in Cape Cod Harbor	1620
New Amsterdam founded	1623
Jogues enters the Society of Jesus	1624
Jogues a professor of literature at Rouen	1625
John Brébeuf arrives at Quebec	1625
Daillon, a Recollect, reaches Niagara River	1626
Boston founded	1630
Maryland settled	1634
Brébeuf founds missions among Hurons	1634
Jogues sent to Canada for the missions	1636
Harvard founded	1636
Ursulines open first girls' school in America	1637
One hundred Huron Christians	1640
Montreal founded	1641
Jogues and Raymbault reach Sault Ste. Marie	1641
New Amsterdam devastated by Indians	1641
Jogues a prisoner of the Mohawks	1642
Jogues arrives in France	1643
Martyrdom of Jogues	1646
Daniel and Garnier martyred by Iroquois	1648
Brébeuf and Lallemant die at the stake	1649
Bishop Laval in New France	1659
Fur traders visit Lake Superior	1660
New Amsterdam becomes New York	1664
Dominie Megapolensis dies in New York	1670
New Amsterdam retaken by Dutch	1673
Marquette accompanies Joliet down the Mississippi	1673
New Amsterdam restored to England	1674
Bull of the See of Quebec (New France)	1674
Niagara founded by La Salle	1679
Philadelphia settled	1682
Father Kino, S.J., in Tucson	1684
Jesuit Mission in California	1697
French in Louisiana	1699

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## SAINT ISAAC JOGUES

### *New France*

Catholic missionary activities in South and Central America soon found their counterpart in the then far north. Up continent, as early as 1566, the Jesuit, Martinez, met death at the hands of tawny-colored Indians off the coast of Georgia. "Both noble and virtuous," declared Governor Menendez, "Father Martinez alone would have accomplished more good than can now be achieved by all the soldiers in Florida." But it was in French territory that the great spiritual adventure took place. New France, remember, covered an enormous country, larger than Europe. Its mountains were the oldest on earth, its Great Lakes were the largest fresh-water system in the world. Pine, fir, spruce formed in places an almost impenetrable wilderness, but the waterways made travel possible by canoe and portage. The first permanent settlement, Quebec (1608), with its fortress built by Champlain, looked out upon a vast region. This northern wilderness is the *mise-en-scène* of a divine drama that unfolds before our eyes. You will see in its plot and incident the conflict between grace and greed; you will also behold a marvellous series of heroic episodes. In the center of the picture is Isaac Jogues, Jesuit and martyr, whose movements dominate the scene. As the years pass, he enters and exits until, engulfed in his own blood, he disappears totally from the picture. One might be tempted to say, "It's all over!" But no, the age-long story had only begun. All the holy hopes and dreams of the martyr-priest were yet to come true. For God is the

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

playwright and the producer of history, and man is merely an actor on the world's stage.

The first Catholic priest who came to New York was Isaac Jogues. But long before his eyes rested on Fort Orange and Manhattan Island, he had tasted the agonies of torture, the bitterness of near death. If we would see the mission picture veritably, let us try to view it in proper perspective. Far off, in the background, are the nations of Europe, restless, grasping, and quarrelsome as ever. They had hoped for a short route to the Indies only to find America standing in their way. So the next best thing, they decided, was to exploit the New World. Great powers — France, Spain, England, Portugal — went all out for the spoils. France had fisheries off Newfoundland and a strong town on the St. Lawrence; England, by virtue of the Cabots who voyaged for the crown, claimed all of North America from Labrador to Florida; Spain, of course, held a tight grip on Florida and Mexico, the Spanish Main and South America. It is not strange that in 1609 the Spaniard, no longer ruler of Europe, had to bow to the independence of the Dutch Netherlander. What is strange is that a gunshot changed the colonial history of America. It so befell that the Mohawks, cruellest of the Five Nations, while on the war path against the Hurons, ran afoul of Champlain who discharged his musket at their lurking scouts. That incident sufficed to make mortal enemies; from then on the Five Nations stood ready to ally themselves with any group hostile to the French. But it is stranger still that in the same year, 1609, Henry Hudson sailed up the Hudson River, and established a trading post, Fort Orange, only a few hundred miles from the scene of Champlain's fatal shot. The story of Father Jogues, as we shall see, is twined with the story of the French and the Dutch, the Indians of the Great Lakes and the Five Nations of the Iroquois. Taken

## *Saint Isaac Jogues*

together, they provide the scenes in the missionary background of the Martyr of the Mohawks.

### *Dreams on a Dais*

A young professor with a talent for poetry and the classics was assigned to teach literature in the Jesuit college at Rouen. The boys in his class could have told you a few things about Brother Jogues. Born in Orleans, of noble blood, he was baptized Isaac in the Church of St. Hilary. As the child grew older he used to describe himself as "a citizen of the Holy Cross," and at ten he was one of the early students in the new Jesuit school, dedicated to the Mother of God. The young collegian proved a wiry, springy little fellow, fast on his feet and a good swimmer; his skin was fair, the features delicate, and he had a rugged constitution. Small though he appears in stature, the lad was to become great in word and deed, a stalwart in God's sight. After completing the courses in Rouen he went to Paris where at seventeen he entered the Jesuit novitiate. One day the discerning novice-master asked Jogues why he had entered the society. The young man replied "Ethiopia and martyrdom!" Whereupon the other said with inspired judgment, "Not so, my child. You will die in Canada." That land, however, was a long way off, besides the society sorely needed teachers. At the time Jesuit schools were acclaimed foremost in Europe, providing, as they did, a truly liberal education. Added to Greek and Latin, there were courses in the vernacular, together with religion, philosophy and science. The French lads found Brother Jogues shy and a bit remote but they did not understand the *pudeur* he showed in suppressing his own personality. And though they knew their instructor for a rhetorician, little did they suspect the dreams that the blackrobe concealed,

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

nor could they ever have guessed that one day his deeds would ring out over the whole earth.

In the college common room the teachers often swapped letters received from overseas. All of them showed intense interest in every scrap of information; first-hand facts of geography and ethnology they had never before come across. But there was far more; for their brothers-in-Christ wrote about intimate observations and perilous journeys. One wonders how many of those letters fell into Brother Jogues' hands, how many crude maps came under his very eyes! It goes without saying that the young professor of literature was deeply impressed. Inwardly he ached to cross the seas and share those close calls. Why, you may ask, did this predestined missionary so want to undertake the gospel enterprises which could spell only dreadful hardships? He had no conception of himself as a preacher. Indeed, Brother Jogues thought very little of himself, even as a professor. But one thing he did have — a deep love of souls. Eternal life for men, for all men, was his heart's desire, and as a true Jesuit he had no aim except to labor for the greater glory of God in the service of Christ. "This is eternal life that they may know God the Father, and Jesus Christ Whom He hath sent." The golden flame of Jogues' charity cast its light across the dark ocean, into the land of savages. There, he saw in piercing vision, were the fields of salvation. There he would gladly go, if only his superiors would give the word. From the dais to the wilds! How often he prayed for that command, and more than ever since his ordination. Yes, he burned with the plan, nor could he rest until the order was given.

### *Dreams Become Reality*

The call came in 1636, and directly Father Jogues crossed the stormy Atlantic and sailed up the St. Lawrence to Quebec!

## *Saint Isaac Jogues*

He found in the quaint frontier settlement Recollect Fathers, the first missionaries on the scene (1615-1629), along with brother Jesuits, fur traders and devout French Catholics. One day as he stood on the banks of the St. Lawrence, gazing westward, a canoe came rapidly down river. It was paddled by red men and a gaunt white who kept stroke with them in perfect rhythm. He was none other than Father Daniel, bareheaded and barefooted, his cassock in tatters, a breviary hanging from a cord round his neck. Nor was it long before Jogues was in the same boat, taking Daniel's place, and west-bound for Huronia. Now at last he would get a foretaste of life fraught with frightful risks in the American wilderness. They set out on a heart-breaking voyage of nine hundred miles, "over dangerous rivers and great lakes, whose storms are like those of the ocean, over other lakes and streams which were reached by skirting rapids and precipices until they finally arrived at the great Lake Huron, which was known as the 'Fresh Water Sea.'" After the roughest going, during which they ate Indian corn, slept on rocks, toted heavy loads along winding portages, the party reached the Indian town of Ihonitiria. There Jogues met Father John Brébeuf, a seasoned missionary, who had founded the mission among the Hurons. Big John was a pioneer of great prowess and the idol of Huronia. Water he loved, water and woods, rocks and trees. The Indians marvelled at his practiced way of getting in and out of a canoe and the power with which he could ply the paddle in the stormiest waves. Taking his brother Jesuit into custody, Brébeuf, full of simple warmth and feeling, watched over him like a mother. He needed to, for in a few days the newcomer, utterly worn out, was down with a fever along with several others. Their bark cabin, turned into a hospital, offered poor protection from Great Lake blasts, and they had only mats for beds and roots for

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

drugs. Things looked bad, very bad, for the sometime professor when it was decided to bleed him. There was considerable delay as to who should wield the lancet; then Jogues himself took over and with cool courage did the gory job. No sooner was he back on his feet than smallpox broke out in the village and began its toll of hundreds. The medicine-men tried to drive the "evil thing" away by recourse to wild orgies; but when these failed the blame as usual was foisted on the missionaries. In point of fact the red men were planning to do away with the strangers when Brébeuf boldly confronted the sachems in their wigwam, winning clemency for all the whites. This was the blood-and-threat pattern of experience our saint was to undergo for ten years.

### *The Way of Hope*

The adventure in Ihonotiria was only a start for Jogues. In company with Brébeuf, he visited village after village, wrought day and night in behalf of Hurons and Algonquins. By and large Big John and little Isaac made a great team. Brébeuf was a rough worker, with hands built for labor and a heart given to God, while Jogues applied his active and practical intelligence with equal zeal. The tasks they faced were as important as the winning of battles for truth, and victory would add to the strength of a divine cause. That they ever survived is a miracle in itself since they braved the face of stark discouragement and often ran into the very jaws of death. "The missionaries," says Parkman, "were like men who trod on the lava-crust of a volcano, while the molten death beneath their feet gleamed white-hot from a thousand crevasses." On the Huron peninsula, they built St. Marie, a residence for the Fathers, which became the very heart of the colonization of Upper Canada. It was an extraordinary venture, this new citadel of peace with its double palisades,

## *Saint Isaac Jogues*

the inner one around the chapel, the fort and a house for French; the outer enclosing a hospital for the sick and a cabin for travellers. Over thirty miles southwest of Huronia lay other camps, where Jogues went with Garnier to preach to the Petuns. The blackrobes seemed to advance everywhere, nothing could stay their zeal. In 1641 Jogues and Raymbault trekked as far as Sault Ste. Marie. "They were," says Bancroft, "the first missionaries to preach the gospel a thousand miles in the interior, five years before John Eliot addressed the Indians six miles from the Boston Harbor." It gives one an idea of the little Jesuit's energy to know that even then he was planning to contact the Indians on Lake Superior and to reach the Sioux near the headwaters of the Mississippi. But it became necessary to return to Quebec for supplies as well as to make a report, and Jogues just thirty, was chosen to direct the perilous voyage. So after six years in the West the doughty black robe retraced the thousand-mile route and rendered an account of his early stewardship.

Jogues, having obtained the necessary supplies, gathered his return party and set out again for the Great Lakes. Two white men, *donnés*, devoted to the missionary, and twenty Hurons, comprised the whole outfit. They were only a day out when scouts detected the first signs of the Iroquois; then they suddenly found themselves ambushed by thrice their number. But let the blackrobe himself tell the story of those terrible days; if ever a letter was blood-caked, penned by a twisted tortured hand, this is it:

We sailed from the Huron territory on the 13th of June, 1642, in four small boats, here called canoes; we were twenty-three souls in all, five of us being French. This line of travel is, in itself, most difficult for many reasons, and especially because, in no less than forty places, both canoes and baggage had to be carried by land on

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

the shoulders. It was now too full of danger from fear of the enemy, who, every year, by lying in wait on the roads to the French settlements, carry off many as prisoners; and, indeed, Father John Brébeuf was all but taken the year before. . . .

Having, therefore, loosed from St. Mary's of the Hurons, amid ever-varying fears of the enemy, dangers of every kind, losses by land and water, we at last, on the thirtieth day after our departure, reached in safety the Conception of the Blessed Virgin. This is a French settlement or colony, called Three Rivers, from a most charming stream near it, which discharges itself into the great river St. Lawrence, by three mouths. We returned hearty thanks to God, and remained here and at Quebec about two weeks. . . .

The second day after our departure had just dawned, when, by the early light, some of our party discovered fresh foot-prints on the shore. . . . We consequently urged on our way, but had scarcely advanced a mile, when we fell into an ambush of the enemy, who lay in two divisions on the opposite banks of the river, to the number of seventy in twelve canoes.

As soon as we reached the spot where they lay in ambush, they poured in a volley of musketry from the reeds and tall grass, where they lurked. Our canoes were riddled, but, though well supplied with fire-arms, they killed none, one Huron only being shot through the hand. At the first report of the fire-arms, the Hurons, almost to a man, abandoned the canoes, which, to avoid the more rapid current of the centre of the river, were advancing close by the bank, and in head-long flight, plunged into the thickest of the woods. We, four Frenchmen, left with a few, either already Christians, or at least Catechumens, offering up a prayer to Christ, faced the enemy. We were, however, out-numbered, being scarcely twelve or fourteen against thirty; yet we fought on, till our comrades, seeing fresh canoes shoot out from the opposite bank of the river, lost heart and fled. . . . As the enemy, in hot pursuit of the fugitives, had passed on, leaving me standing on the battle-field, I called out to one of those who remained to guard the prisoners, and bade him make me a fellow captive to his French captive, that, as

## *Saint Isaac Jogues*

I had been his companion on the way, so would I be in his dangers and death. Scarce giving credit to what he heard, and fearful for himself, he advanced and led me to the other prisoners.

I now turned to the Huron prisoners, and, instructing them one by one, baptized them; as new prisoners were constantly taken in their flight, my labor was constantly renewed. At length Eustace Ahatsistari, that famous Christian chief, was brought in; when he saw me, he exclaimed, "Solemnly did I swear, brother, that I would live or die by thee." What I answered, I know not, so had grief overcome me. Last of all, William Couture was dragged in; he too, had set out from Huronia with me.

Two of them then dragged me back to where I had been before, and scarcely had I begun to breathe, when some others, attacking me, tore out, by biting, almost all my nails, and crunched my two fore-fingers with their teeth, giving me intense pain. The same was done to René Goupil, the Huron captives being left untouched.

At last, on the eve of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, we reached the first village of the Iroquois. I thank our Lord Jesus Christ, that, on the day when the whole Christian world exults in the glory of His Mother's Assumption into heaven, He called us to some small share and fellowship of his sufferings and cross.

Both banks were filled with Iroquois and Hurons formerly captured, now coming forth to meet us, the latter to salute us by a warning that we were to be burnt alive; the former received us with clubs, fists and stones.

We had but just time to gain breath on this stage, when one with a huge club gave us Frenchmen three terrible blows on the bare back; the savages now took out their knives and began to mount the stage and cut off the fingers of many of the prisoners; and, as a captive undergoes their cruelty in proportion to his dignity, they began with me, seeing, by my conduct, as well as by my words, that I was in authority among the French and Hurons. Accordingly, an old man and a woman approached the spot where I stood; he commanded his companion to cut off my thumb; she at first drew back, but at last, when ordered to do so three or four times by the

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

old wretch, as if by compulsion she cut off my left thumb where it joins the hand. . . . Then, taking in my other hand the amputated thumb, I offered it to Thee, my true and living God, calling to mind the sacrifice which I had for seven years constantly offered Thee in Thy Church.

One thing at least seemed certain — death! And Jogues' stay of more than a year in the Indian village was a nightmare, black and endless. "Yet," he says, "amid all this the Lord gave me such strength that suffering myself, I was able to console the suffering Hurons and French." Put to the terrible ordeal of running the gauntlet, they were led around, bruised and bleeding, through the villages, and they saw a scaffold intended for their own end. The behavior of the braves was wildly contradictory; one day they wore the mask of a friend, the next full of rage and scorn they threatened dire destruction. There was no telling when the captives would be tomahawked or burnt at the stake. All they knew was that grisly death was ever near, awaiting only a sign from the sachems.

### *Friends in Need*

The Dutch, having heard of their plight, talked of sending a rescue party. A command was issued by Governor Kieft of Manhattan instructing the commandant at Fort Orange to rescue Jogues at all costs. Arendt Van Curler and his brave burghers canoed twenty leagues up the Mohawk and endeavored to secure the liberation of the white prisoners. They offered goods worth six hundred florins, which was all the young colony could afford; though the offer was tempting, the Mohawks could not be deterred from their fell plan to do away with their prisoners. Try as the Dutch might, the wily red men listened, looked at the gifts, shook their heads and — lyingly promised to release the captives in a few days.

## *Saint Isaac Jogues*

The burghers reluctantly turned away, only to be followed a pace by the Frenchmen, shaking with fear and pleading piteously that the visitors abandon them not to the hands of the bloody Mohawks. After that the lives of all hung by a thread. René Goupil, returning with Jogues from prayer, met two Indians lying in wait. "One of them plucking forth his tomahawk, dealt René so deadly a blow on the head, that he fell lifeless, invoking the most Holy Name of Jesus as he fell." Why they spared Jogues is something of a mystery, though it is likely they desired to torture him the more. When trading time came the Indians, with their bundles of pelts and furs, brought the blackrobe with them to Fort Orange. It was his one and only chance after thirteen terrible months. The Dutch, once more his stout defenders, stowed the refugee away in a garret where for six weeks he lay within earshot of Indians who stealthily pursued their search. Thanks to Dominie Megapolensis the half-starved missionary was looked after with the greatest affection else he might have departed this life then and there. The Dominie, once a Catholic now a Calvinist, had the deepest regard for the heroic priest, nursed him in his own house, then in early winter accompanied his precious charge down to Manhattan Island. A crowd gathered about the blackrobe eager to learn of his experiences, and one of them fell at his feet and kissed the mangled hands, exclaiming, "Martyr of Jesus Christ! Martyr of Jesus Christ!" "Are you a Catholic?" asked Jogues. "No, I am a Lutheran, but I recognize you as one who suffered for the Master." There were only two Catholics in the Dutch settlement by the sea: a Portuguese woman, wife of an ensign, and an Irishman who had lived in Maryland. Of the island of his refuge, Jogues wrote, "It is seven leagues in circuit, and on it is a fort to serve as a commencement of a town to be built there and to be called New

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

Amsterdam." After a month's sojourn arrangements were made by the Dutch that he cross the stormy Atlantic in one of their wretched luggers.

Jogues sailed in crazy weather and arrived at the shores of Brittany on Christmas Day, 1643. More dead than alive he dragged his weary frame to the nearest college of the Society, in Rennes.

"Do you come from Canada?" the rector asked.

"I do!" replied the stranger.

"Do you know Father Jogues?"

"Very well, indeed."

"Is he alive or dead?"

"He is alive."

"Where is he?"

"I am he," was the quiet reply.

When his brethren beheld the ghost of a man and saw the stumps of his hand they knew what the word "savage" really signified. Word of the hero's return rapidly spread until it reached the gossip of the royal court. The Queen Regent, Ann of Austria, sent for Jogues and insisted on giving him audience much as the missionary disliked public receptions. She questioned him about his escapes but Jogues was one who never liked to talk about himself. Time on earth was too short for heroics; not for him to give a long travelogue touching on journey after journey in the face of hostility, in the shadow of never-absent death. On being pressed, however, he opened his cloak and showed the Queen his mangled hands. Then she came down from her throne, took his hands and with eyes full of tears kissed them. "People write romances for us," she said, "but was there ever a romance like this? And it is all true!" Pope Urban VIII, too, regarded the shaken Jesuit as a martyr; he did a most extraordinary thing,

### *Saint Isaac Jogues*

granting him an unprecedented permission to say Mass with mutilated hands. "It would be wrong," the Vicar of Christ declared, "to prevent the martyr of Christ from drinking the Blood of Christ."

### *The Way of Charity*

The battered warrior of the missions, eager to get back to New France, boarded the first boat, a tub that was utterly unseaworthy. Old friends in Quebec welcomed him, and he visited the Ursulines who, in 1637, had opened the first girls' school in North America. It appears that the Iroquois were on the war path against the Hurons, yet Jogues ached to be back in the wilds serving the savages. But the hour was not propitious, would not be until a chance for peace presented itself. As soon as the black clouds disappeared, the French planned a parley with the Iroquois, naming Jogues who knew their language, to head the party. One never could tell what might come to pass. Would it be peace at last or would it be back again to the frightful ordeals, the fierce tortures of the angry Iroquois? Anyhow, the nearest thing to Jogues' heart was a mission among the Iroquois and, God willing, the embassy might open a door thereto. The party left Three Rivers on the 16th of May, 1646, travelled down Lake Champlain and continued their journey to Lake George. It was the same route by which Jogues had come before, only then he lay tomahawked, unconscious in the bottom of a canoe. On the eve of Corpus Christi, he gave the beautiful lake the name Lac du Saint Sacrement, which it bore for more than a century. Then they made their way to Rensselaerwyck by the upper Hudson, Jogues wanting to thank the kindly Dutchmen who had befriended him. They reached the first Iroquois' castle in three weeks, attended a council of the sachems and urged peace measures. With the giving of the

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

wampum belt and other presents, the Indians appeared placated, and the Wolf family actually received Jogues as one of their own. The missionary, having accomplished his task, visited and consoled the captive Christians, administering the Sacraments to many. But certain disappointed-looking Mohawks, disliking such acts, pressed his departure. So, after less than a month's stay, he made the journey back towards the St. Lawrence. Unfortunately, the blackrobe left behind a box with mission articles which the Mohawks regarded with suspicion until Jogues opened it and showed them the contents. The Indians, far from pleased, agreed to hold the hated thing but in wily fashion kept their dark thoughts to themselves. Upon reaching Canada, the weary travellers were welcomed with open arms, many having doubted Jogues would ever return. Once safe among friends, however, he dearly wanted to go back and preach the Gospel to the Mohawks. The condition of the Christian captives haunted him, for he knew what they had undergone, even as he himself had suffered; he also knew that at any time they might be done to death by the club or knife of a straying Iroquois. But the Superiors, in a state of uncertainty and apprehension, said, "Nay!" so he bowed to the will of God. The matter uneasily rested while summer wore on, but no hostilities were reported. Things being quiet and the prospects encouraging, the pendulum of opinion still swung to and fro, till at last they granted the intrepid missionary permission to return to the scene of his former trials.

### *Martyr of the Mohawks*

The leaves of the forest were russet and blood red when in September, 1646, Jogues left with a *donné*, John LaLand, and some Huron guides whose task was to paddle the canoes and carry the baggage. This time, on the march for souls,

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

insults. Idle to remind the Indians of their treaty — one of them sliced the muscle from his arm, and while eating it said, "Let us see if this white flesh is the flesh of a manitou!" "No," the priest replied, "I am a man like you all. Why do you put me to death? I have come to your country to teach you the way to Heaven, and you treat me like a wild beast." In the council, a division arose among the clans; it was the old argument as to whether they should kill or spare the priest. The Wolf and the Tortoise were for him, but a faction of the Bears clamored for his death. Time went grimly by and Jogues hung between two worlds; he had no illusions at all of the future that awaited him. Very soon the omens began to look bad. As the hunting season drew near, the braves got ready for the chase and the lodge-house grew quite deserted, save for a few wily Bear plotters determined to do away with the missionary.

It was the eighth day of October 1646. The sun of an aging year rose on the walls of the palisades, lighting the filthy lodgings of the Mohawks. Its rays moved to a horribly lousy cabin where Jogues lay dog-tired, unable to sleep, after tending his cruelly inflicted wounds. The hunters had gone into the hills, leaving the old men, women and children at home. There was a kind old squaw whom Jogues called "Aunt" who had long but vainly begged with tears for her "nephew's" life. Only too well did the "nephew" know the venom in the hearts of the wolf pack, the menace in their every move. The longer he had waited the more sinister were their threats as they stalked him from dawn to dark. Did they intend to postpone the agony until the hunters returned to share in the horror? Their wild yells rang in his ears; yet one hope sustained him, a hope that even in captivity he could win more souls to Christ. The stoicism of the blackrobe doubtless amazed the plotters, his courage

### *Saint Isaac Jogues*

in the face of death was a thing they secretly admired. But it did not win a shred of pity from the clubbers who had sworn to have his life. Now with the hunters far away, the coast was at last clear for the ruthless conspirators. They sent a messenger to invite the captive into their tent, and Jogues must have seen the wolfish glare in their eyes. Yet this gentleman of God accepted the fated invitation and with desperate difficulty dragged himself after the brave. He walked in a slow, heavy way, crippled by his wounds, faithful to the last. And as he bent low to enter the wigwam a waiting Indian swung his tomahawk, cracked down on the bowed guest and split his skull. The fell deed done, an orgy of hate followed, in which a gruesome scene was enacted. They stuck the holy head on a stake of the palisade as a warning to all intruders, then they cast the pure, scar-clad body into the fast-flowing river.

### *The Mission Field*

Two years later, Father Daniel, one of Brébeuf's first associates was slain by the Iroquois. The fearless Garnier too was tomahawked, and the Huron missions gravely threatened. The next year, 1649, Brébeuf and Lallemant climbed the red road and met their death at the stake. All these men carried the cross and walked in the steps of Christ; for the sake of poor neglected souls they labored in many places through heroic years. Time and again the face of the world changed for them; there were the partings with their brethren, betrayals by those they served, seeming failure of their highest hopes. Such was the lot of those early pioneers who blazed the blessed trail! Their deeds, their valor, their humility thrill and inspire all who want men to live in dignity, honor and peace. But before closing, let us get a last glimpse of the great embracive panorama of the missions. The

## *Church History in the Light of the Saints*

sixteenth century, as we have seen, witnessed the advance of missionaries in Central and South America. By its midpoint, Dominicans, Franciscans and Jesuits were found laboring among the Indians in what is now the southern part of the United States. On the other side of the globe, Francis Xavier, "the greatest missionary since St. Paul," sailed from Lisbon and landed in India, after touching at Mozambique, Melinda and Socatra. Then he went to far-off Japan, preached to the Bonzes, and died off the coast of China in 1552. When Cartier and Champlain opened the way for New France, they were quickly followed by Recollects and Jesuits. In 1640 there were a hundred Huron Christians but the Iroquois quite wiped out that great mission project. Yet the Jesuits continued west; Marquette paddled down the Mississippi with Joliet, and later established missions among the Illinois Indians. Other stalwarts of Christ, pushing right on in the footprints of the explorers, preached the Gospel and taught the natives the rudiments of the faith.

The seventeenth century found the heralds of the Gospel afoot the world over. While the missions in eastern Asia, India, China and Japan, begun with so much zeal and energy, continued under great difficulties, Pope Urban VIII opened in Rome the College of the Propaganda, foremost of all missionary schools. The next century saw the missions grow strong and fruitful. Benedict XIV (1740-1758) recommended the development of a native clergy in New Spain, and King Ferdinand VI gave great encouragement to the missionaries. Over five hundred priests came from Europe and so efficient was their work that by the end of the century thirty out of forty-one bishops were of Indian stock. In Mexico, Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans labored despite the hostility of greedy whites and the raids of untamed Indians. There were sporadic persecutions, and in 1767 the

## *Saint Isaac Jogues*

Jesuits were deported, many dying en route, having been compelled to abandon their converts. Frey Junipero Serra led a band of fifteen Franciscan missionaries and established missions in Lower California (1767) and two years later in Upper California. The nineteenth century dawned over a warlike Europe and foreign missions received a set-back from small-souled nations, as well as from local strife and hostile natives. None the less many missions speedily revived and owed to better organization and well-trained workers. In 1817 the Propaganda took charge of all mission work; new congregations of men and women were found in the van, and the older missionary groups labored with renewed zeal. The Oblate Fathers evangelized the far Canadian wilderness and penetrated into the Arctic Circle. In 1867 the College of the Propaganda could count students from twenty-five different nations; until the Global War it numbered thousands on its roll. Our own America has entered the ranks of mission workers throughout the world. Hosts of brave young men and women of the United States and Canada have gone forth to join hands with veterans in fields white for the harvest. All of them, like their predecessors in the faith, are inspired by the love of souls and the desire to serve the cause of Christ. The secret of their zeal — and their amazing success — was revealed ages ago in an imperishable psalm:

Yet do I stay by Thee ever.  
Thou holdest my right hand fast.  
Thou leadest me according to Thy counsel,  
And takest me by the hand after Thee.  
Whom have I in Heaven?  
Whom, beside Thee, do I care for on earth?  
My body and my heart pass away,  
But the Rock of my heart and my portion is God evermore.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ps. LXXII, 24-26



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## INDEX

- Abelard, 242 seq.  
 Adrian II, Pope, 171  
 Africa, North, 45  
 Agilulf, 119, 138  
 Aidan, 147  
 Albert the Great, St., 265  
 Albigenses, 258, 264 seq.  
 Alboin, 113  
 Alcuin, 170  
 Aldhelm, 147  
 Alemanni, 137, 151  
 Alexander VI, Pope, 316 seq.  
 Alps, 193 seq.  
 Amator, 87  
 Ambrose, St., 59, 163  
 America, 381, 411; early explorers,  
     411 seq., 444  
 Anabaptists, 332  
 Anacletus, Pope, 20  
 Andrew, St., 3, 4, 19  
 Anglo-Saxon laws, 223  
 Annegray, 131  
 Anselm, 228  
 Ansgar, St., 169, 187  
 Anthony of Egypt, St., 45-56  
 Antioch, 12  
 Antoninus, Pius, 32, 33  
 Apologists, 33, 34, 35, 45  
 Apollinaris, 69  
 Apostles, 5, 19, 20  
 Aquila, 13  
 Arabs, 143  
 Arians, 61, 62, 65, 78, 81, 143  
 Arnold of Brescia, 243  
 Athanasius, St., 59, 62, 66, 67, 73  
 Atila, 89, 99  
 Augustine, O.S.B., 119, 120, 147  
 Augustine, St., 59, 77, 78  
 Augustinians, 414  
 Austria, 380  
 Avars, 164  
 "Babylonian captivity," the, 281,  
     seq.; 290  
 Barbarians, 81, 111, seq.; 113, 125.  
     See, also, Huns, Goths, Vandals,  
     Lombards, Slavs  
 Bar-cochab, 31, 32  
 Barnabus, St., 15  
 Bartholomew, St., 19  
 Basques, 164  
 Belisarius, 112  
 Benedict Biscop, 147  
 Benedict of Nursia, St., 105-122  
 Benedict XIV, Pope, 375, 376  
 Benedictines, 81, 117, 119, 147, 172,  
     230  
 Benignus, 93, 96  
 Bernard of Clairvaux, St., 235-253  
 Bernard of Menthon, St., 191-207  
 Bismarck, 406  
 Bobbio, 138, seq.  
 Boccaccio, 281  
 Boetius, 121  
 Bonaventure, St., 271, 276  
 Boniface, St., 146-166  
 Bonosus, 63, 67, 68  
 Brebeuf, John, St., 437 seq.  
 Brendan, St., 129  
 Brigid of Sweden, St., 295  
 Brigid, St., 102  
 Brunhild, 135, 136  
 Bruno, the Carthusian, 230  
 Burgundians, 304, seq.; 311

# *Index*

- Caesar, 7, 12, 27
- Caledonia, 111
- Calvin, 332, 341
- Camoldeuse, 230
- Canute, 213
- Capuchins, 346
- Caracella, 46
- Carafa, 334, 335
- Carloman, 160
- Carmelites, 346
- Carolingians, 161
- Carthusians, 248
- Cassiodorus, 122
- Catherine of Siena, St., 281-297
- Celestine I, Pope, 88, 97
- Champlain, 433
- Charlemagne (Charles I, the Great)
  - 163 seq.; 169, 170
- Charles, the Bald, 170, 171, 180
- Charles Martel, 142, 151, 158, 159, 160
- Charles V, Emperor, 328
- Charles VII, 302 seq.
- Chaucer, 281
- Chaucon, Pierre, Bp., 310, 311
- Christian Brothers, 351 seq.
- Christians, Early, 26, 40, 45; soldiers, 28, 29
- Christianity, 32
- Church, the Catholic; foundations, 11, 22; Early Church, 33, 35, 40, 55, 56, 61, 77, 78; in Dark Ages, 81, 115, 117, 125, 149, 150, 156, 169; in Middle Ages, 187, 188, 192, 225, seq., 257; in Modern Times, 301, 315, 316, 341, 345, 347, 357, 367 seq., 382, 397; Eastern Church, 100, 125, 144, 154 seq., 171, 186 seq., 217
- Cistercians, 230, 239 seq.
- Cîteaux, 239
- Clairvaux, 240
- Claudius, 13, 14
- Clement of Alexandria, 45
- Clement I, 22
- Clement V, 281
- Clothaïre, 136
- Clotilda, 100
- Clovis, 81, 100, 129
- Cluny, 230
- Colet, 338
- Columba, St., 120
- Columban, St., 120-143
- Columbus, 411, 412
- Commodius, 39
- Communism, 399
- Conrad III, Emperor, 245
- Constans, 61
- Constantine, 60, 61
- Constantinople, Council of, 313
- Constantius, 61
- Constantius Chlorus, 60
- Corbie, 173
- Crescens, 32
- Crough-Patrick, 100
- Crusades, origin of, 235; first, 236, seq.; second, 244, seq.; third, 250, seq.; sixth, 259, 272
- Cyprian, St., 45, 47
- Damian, Peter, 224, 230
- Damasus, Pope, 59, 74, 75
- Danes, 176, seq.; 184, 212
- Dante, 257, 276, 281
- Dark Ages, 81, 125, 186
- Decius, 54
- Denis, St., Pope, 22
- Denmark, 176, 206
- Diocletian, 60, 65
- Diognetus, epistle to, 40
- Dionysius, 45, 47
- Disciplina arcani, 33
- Dispersion, 16
- Dominic, St., 260, 264
- Dominicans, 260, seq.; 325
- Domitian, 22

# *Index*

- Donatists, 61  
 Druids, 84, 91, 92-96
- Edward, the Confessor, St., 211, 231  
 Eleutherius, Pope, 40  
 England, 147, 191, 212, seq.; 223, 228, 248, 318, 338, 381  
 Ephesus, 28, 88  
 Ephrem, Syrian, St., 59, 70  
 Ethelbert of Kent, 120  
 Ethelred, the Unready, 212, seq.  
 Eucharist, 14  
 Eugene IV, Pope, 315  
 Eusebius, 60  
 Evaristus, Pope, 22
- Fathers, of the Church, 59, 77, 78, 314  
 Felix II, Pope, 100  
 Ferdinand, the Catholic, King, 323  
 Feudalism, 160, 191, seq.  
 Firbolgs, 90  
 Fisher, John, St., 338, 339  
 Flanders, 179  
 Florence, Council of, 313  
 Forum, Roman, 12  
 France, 301, seq.; 305, seq.; 350, 434. See, also Gaul, Franks  
 France, New, 433 seq.  
 Francis of Assisi, St., 257  
 Francis, Solano, St., 416  
 Franciscans, 258, 414, 450, seq.  
 Franks, 81, 100, 111, 129, 160, 191, 199  
 Frederick I (Barbarossa) Emperor, 247, seq.; 251; II, Emperor, 258, 273, seq.  
 Frederick, the Elector, 324, seq.  
 Frederick, the Great, 373, seq.  
 Fridolin, St., 120  
 Frisians, 162  
 Fulda, 162, 163, 198
- Galatians, 66  
 Galerius, 20  
 Galilee, 3, 5, 8  
 Gall, St., 121, 137, 142, 197  
 Gallienus, 50, 54  
 Gaul, 65, 86, 213  
 Genseric, 99  
 Germans, 120, 150, seq.; 191, 318, 324-341, 367, 406  
 Germanus, St., 87, 90  
 Gertrude, St., 257  
 Gethsemane, 9  
 Gildas, the Briton, 122  
 Gordian, 46  
 Goths, 77, 86, 97, 99  
 Gregory the Great, 115, 118; II, 150; III, 153, seq.; VII, 224, 228; XI, 292, seq.  
 Gregory, Nazianzus, St., 59, 73  
 Gregory of Nyssa, St., 59, 79  
 Gregory of Tours, 122  
 Gualberto, John, St., 230
- Hadrian, 27, 31  
 Hamburg, 180  
 Hastings, Battle of, 222  
 Heliogabalus, 46  
 Henry II, 248; IV, Emperor, 224, 228; VI, 252, seq.; VIII, King, 331, 338, 340  
 Hilary of Poitiers, St., 59, 66  
 Hilary, St., Pope, 99  
 Hildebrand. See Gregory VII  
 Holy Alliance, 399  
 Holy Roman Empire, 166, 169, 180, 185, 191, seq.; 211, 218, 281, seq. 340  
 Honorius, 82  
 Hormisdas, Pope, 115  
 Huguenots, 358, seq.  
 Humanists, 311, 315, 327  
 Hundred Years War, 305, seq.

# Index

- Hungary, 164, 218  
 Huns, 81, 86, 97, 99, 197  
 Huronia, 437, seq.  
 Hyginus, Pope, 32  
  
 Ignatius, of Loyola, St., 323, 341  
 Inca, Land of, 413, seq.  
 Innocent I, Pope, 86, 97; IV, 263; VII, 291  
 Iona, 147  
 Ireland, 81, 84, 90-102, 111, 127, seq.; 206  
 Irish, 92; missionaries, 101-102, 120, 147. See, also, Scots  
 Isidore of Seville, St., 122, 126  
 Islam, 143, seq.; 156  
 Italy, 113, 191, 200, 203, seq.; 291, 399, 406  
  
 James, St., 15, 19  
 Jerome, St., 59-77  
 Jerusalem, 11, 28, 32, 76; Council of, 15  
 Jesuits, 335, seq.; 346, 368, 370, 376, seq.; 398, 414  
 Jesus, of Nazareth, 3-11  
 Jews, 26, 48, 258  
 Joan, of Arc, St., 300-310  
 Jogues, Isaac, St., 433-451  
 John, Baptist de la Salle, St., 345-363  
 John, Baptist di Rossi, St., 367-384  
 John, Baptist Vianney, St., 387-407  
 John of the Cross, St., 337  
 John, the Apostle, 19, 22  
 John, the Baptist, 3, 4, 8  
 John VIII, Pope, 187, 188; XII, 200  
 Jordanis, the Goth, 122  
 Jude, St., 19  
 Julian, the Apostate, 73  
 Juliana of Norwich, 289, seq.  
 Justin, Martyr, St., 25-40  
 Justinian, 111, 112, 117  
  
 Kieran, St., 128  
 Kilian, St., 126, 151  
 Kingdom, of God, 7, 8, 14, 20, 75  
 Kulturkampf, 406  
  
 Lake George, 445  
 Lanfranc, 228, 229  
 Las Casas, 323, 411, 412  
 Leander, 120  
 Leo, I, the Great, Pope, 98; III, 165, 166; IV, 181, 182; X, 217, seq.; 325; XIII, 407  
 Leo, the Isaurian, 150, 156  
 Lima, 418, seq.  
 Linus, Pope, 20  
 Lombards, 113, 115, 119, 138, seq.; 150, 155, 164, 201, 250  
 Lothair, 170, 171, 179, 180  
 Louis, the German, 170, 180  
 Louis, the Pious, 170, 173, 178  
 Louis VII, King, 242, 245; IX, St., 272, seq.; XIV, 350, seq., 361; XVI, 382  
 Luther, Martin, 324, seq.  
 Luxeuil, 132, 136  
  
 Magyars, 207  
 Marcian, 32  
 Marcus, Aurelius, 36, 38, 39  
 Martin, of Tours, 84, 85, 121  
 Martyrs, Christian, 16, 19, 32, 39, 47, 54, 55, 60, 62, 73, seq.; 448, 449  
 Matthew, St., 19  
 Maximim, 60  
 Maximinus, Thracian, 46  
 Maximus, St., 89  
 Mazarin, 358, 359  
 Mazzini, 399  
 Merovingians, 129, 130, 161  
 Messias, 3, 4  
 Milan, Edict of, 61  
 Milcho, 82, 83, 93  
 Ministry, Public, 5

## *Index*

- Missionaries, in the Early Church, 16, 19, 66; in Dark Ages, 81, 101, 102, 109, 118, 121, 126, 142, 149, 153, 173, 177; in Middle Ages, 197, 201, 207; in Modern Times, 335, 415, seq.; 449, seq.  
 Mohammed, 143, seq. See, also, Islam  
 Mohawks, 434, seq.  
 Monasticism, 53, 68, seq., 72, 173, 192, 197, seq.; 230  
 Mongols, 263  
 Montanus, 45  
 Monte Cassino, 108, 110, 112, 260  
 Moors, 193  
 More, Thomas, St., 338, 340  
 Moslem, 125, 181, 182, 187, 234, 251  
  
 Napoleon I, 389, seq., 395, 396  
 Nathi, 92  
 Nero, 16, 17, 20  
 Nerva, 26  
 Nestorius, 88  
 New Testament, 76  
 Nial, 82, 91, 92  
 Nice, Council of, 62  
 Nicholas I, Pope, 185, 187  
 Normans, 212, seq., 219; Norman invasion, 221  
 Northmen. See Vikings  
 Norway, 206  
 Novatian, 45  
  
 Odoacer, 99  
 Oratorians, 346  
 Ordeal, 16, 17  
 Orders of Women, 346, 347  
 Orleans, 307, 308  
 Ostrogoths, 99, 111  
 Otto I, Emperor, 199, 218  
  
 Pacomius, 53  
 Palestine, 3, 25  
  
 Palladius, 88, 89  
 Papacy, 81  
 Paschasius, Radabertus, 175  
 Patrick, St., 81-102  
 Paul, St., 15, 19  
 Paula, 74  
 Pax Romana, 39  
 Pentecost, 11  
 Pepin, 160, seq.  
 Persecutions, 16-19, 33, 36, 38, 47, 54, 55, 60  
 Peru, 413, seq.  
 Peter the Apostle, 3-22; epistles of 11; journeys, 13, 16; martyrdom 18  
 Peter the Great, 368  
 Peter's Patrimony, 117, 253  
 Philip the Arabian, 46  
 Philip, St., 19  
 Philippines, 429  
 Photius, 186, 187  
 Picts, 111  
 Pilate, Pontius, 6  
 Pius II, Pope, 315, 316; VI, 38; seq.; VII, 389, seq.; IX, 400, 40  
 Pizzaro, 412, seq.  
 Plague, Black, 116, 281  
 Pliny, 27, 28  
 Plotinus, 45  
 Poland, 380  
 Polycarp, 35, 36  
 Portugal, 368, 376, 377, 434  
 Priscilla, 13  
 Prophets, 29, 30, 31  
 Providence, 39  
 Prussians, 258, 373, seq., 380, 39, 406  
  
 Quebec, 433  
  
 Reformation, the, 327, 341; Counte Reformation, 336, seq.  
 Remegius, St., 100

# *Index*

- Renaissance, 311, 316, 318  
 Revolution, French, 362, 363, 369,  
     382, seq.  
 Richard, the Lion-heart, 252, 253  
 Richelieu, 357, seq.  
 Rienzi, 285, seq.; 312  
 Rollo, the Sea Rover, 207, 212  
 Roman Empire, 12, 48, 64, 81, 116,  
     188, 199  
 Rome, 12, 17, 64, 106, 165, seq.; in  
     Dark Ages, 81, 98, 99, 105, 143;  
     in Middle Ages, 187, 200, 211, 217,  
     258, 291; in Modern Times, 312,  
     315, 316  
 Rose of Lima, St., 411-429  
 Rousseau, 367, 368  
 Russia, 207, 217, seq.; 380  
  
 Saladin, 251  
 Samaria, 1, 25  
 Saracens, 81, 181, 182, 245  
 Savonarola, 316  
 Saxons, 212  
 Saxony, 174  
 Scandinavia, 148, 206. See, also,  
     Vikings  
 Schism, the Great Western, 295, 296  
 Schleswig, 183  
 Schoolmen, 229  
 Scotland, 218  
 Scots, 81, 90, 91, 97  
 Scotus, John, Erigenus, 181  
 Segebert, 142  
 Septimus, Severus, 45  
 Serra, Junipero, 451  
 Shepherd of Hermes, 35  
 Siena, 284  
 Simon, St., 19  
 Sixtus III, Pope, 98; V, 316  
 Slavs, 81, 179, 207  
 Spain, 111, 143, 191, 318, 340, 368,  
     411, 434  
  
 "Spiritual Exercises," 327, 331  
 Subiaco, 106, 108  
 Suevi, 137  
 Swabia, 141  
 Sweden, 178, seq.  
 Sylvester II, 205  
  
 Tacitus, 17, 20  
 Tara, 94  
 Tecelin, 235, seq.  
 Teresa, of Avila, 337  
 Tertullian, 77  
 Teutons, 81, 151, seq.  
 Thebaid, 56  
 Theodobert, 137  
 Theodoric, 81, 99, 105  
 Theophylact, 191  
 Thierry, 135, seq.  
 Thomas à Becket, St., 248, seq.  
 Thomas à Kempis, 314, 319  
 Thomas, of Aquino, St., 257-277  
 Thomas, St., Apostle, 19  
 Tiberius, 6  
 Totila, 110, 112  
 Trajan, 27  
 Trent, Council of, 337, 338  
 Truce, of God, 224  
 Trypho, 30  
 Tuatha de Danann, 90, 91, 97  
 Turibio, St., 415, seq.; 419  
 Turks, 237, 258  
  
 Universities, 257, 268, 270, 314  
 Urban III, Pope, 235; VI, 295, seq.  
  
 Valerian, 50, 54  
 Vandals, 97, 99  
 Vikings, 172, 174, seq.; 212  
 Vincent de Paul, St., 346  
 Vincent of Lerins, St., 86

## *Index*

Vincentians, 346  
Visigoths, 111, 120, 156  
Voltaire, 367

Waldenses, 264  
Wales, 219  
Wilfrid, St., 126, 147

William, the Conqueror, 221, seq.  
Wolsey, Cardinal, 338  
World War I, 407

Zachary, Pope, 159, 161  
Zeno, 100  
Zwingli, 332













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